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BODY AND SOUL

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

A MAN FROM THE NORTH
ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS
LEONORA A GREAT MAN
SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE
WHOM GOD HATH JOINED
BURIED ALIVE
THE OLD WIVES' TALE
THE GLIMPSE THE ROLL CALL
HELEN WITH THE HIGH HAND
CLAYHANGER HILDA LESSWAYS
THE CARD THE REGENT
THE PRICE OF LOVE THESE TWAIN
THE LION'S SHARE THE PRETTY LADY

FANTASIES

THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL
THE GATES OF WRATH
TERESA OF WATLING STREET
THE LOOT OF CITIES
HUGO THE GHOST
THE CITY OF PLEASURE

SHORT STORIES

TALES OF THE FIVE TOWNS
THE GRIM SMILE OF THE FIVE TOWNS
THE MATADOR OF THE FIVE TOWNS

BELLES-LETTRES

JOURNALISM FOR WOMEN
FAME AND FICTION
HOW TO BECOME AN AUTHOR
THE TRUTH ABOUT AN AUTHOR
MENTAL EFFICIENCY
HOW TO LIVE ON TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY
THE HUMAN MACHINE LITERARY TASTE
FRIENDSHIP AND HAPPINESS
THOSE UNITED STATES PARIS NIGHTS
MARRIED LIFE LIBERTY
OVER THERE: WAR SCENES
THE AUTHOR'S CRAFT BOOKS AND PERSONS
SELF AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

DRAMA

POLITE FARCES CUPID AND COMMONSENSE
WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS
THE HONEYMOON THE TITLE
THE GREAT ADVENTURE
MILESTONES (In Collaboration with Edward Knoblock)
JUDITH SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE
In Collaboration with Eden Phillpotts
THE SINEWS OF WAR: A ROMANCE
THE STATUE: A ROMANCE

BODY AND SOUL

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

LONDON

CHATTO & WINDUS

1922

DP

5

DP

1922

LIST OF CHARACTERS

BLANCHE NIXON

LADY MAB INFOLD

MRS. CLEWS

EDITH TUNNICLIFF

PARLOURMAID

AARON DRAPER

EZRA CLEWS

PROCOPO

THE MARQUIS OF WIX

WAITER

ACT I

*Lady Mab's sitting-room in the Grand
Babylon Hotel*

Sc. i. Morning.

Sc. ii. The same morning ; immediately after
Sc. i.

ACT II

Same as Act I

Sc. i. Evening of the same day.

Sc. ii. The same evening ; immediately after
Sc. i.

Sc. iii. The following morning.

ACT III

Mrs. Clews's drawing-room at Bursley

Sc. i. Afternoon of the same day.

Sc. ii. Afternoon of the following day.

ACT IV

Same as Act I

Morning of the next day but one.

ACT I

ACT I

SCENE I

Lady Mab Infold's *private sitting-room in the Grand Babylon Hotel.*

The furniture and decorations are in the most extreme manner of the Roger Fry school.

Doors centre, left, and right.

TIME : *Morning.* Lady Mab is alone.

Enter Waiter, followed by Aaron Draper.

WAITER. Mr. Aaron Draper.

Exit Waiter.

LADY MAB (*hastening eagerly towards Draper*).
Darling, may I tell you a secret ?

AARON. Tell.

LADY MAB. At first I thought your name was absurd. Now I love it. Aaron !

AARON. Pretty good old ecclesiastical name.

LADY MAB. But do be David for a bit.

AARON. David ?

LADY MAB. David would have kissed me ten times before this. (*They embrace tenderly.*) Would you mind kissing my eyes ? (*Aaron does so.*) Ah ! (*with a sigh of ecstasy.*) You kiss well. Let us sit.

AARON. What are you going to do with that pipe, Mab ?

LADY MAB (*filling a pipe*). Smoke it, of course.

AARON (*incredulous*). You aren't !

LADY MAB. Why not ? Heaps of girls at the Slade smoke pipes.

AARON. What's the Slade ?

LADY MAB. You don't mean to say you've never heard of the Slade !

AARON. Oh ! That art student place.

LADY MAB. It's the best school of art in England.

AARON. Still——

LADY MAB. I suppose girls may smoke ?

AARON. Certainly.

LADY MAB. Then why shouldn't they smoke pipes ? What's the difference between smoking a pipe and smoking cigarettes ? Each of them is merely a device for getting the vapour of tobacco into the human mouth. Wood or paper, what can it matter ?

AARON. True.

LADY MAB. The objection to women smoking pipes is purely conventional.

AARON. True.

LADY MAB. Moreover, all you men say that pipes are the healthiest form of smoking and cigarettes the most vicious.

AARON. True.

LADY MAB. Well, then. There's no answer to the argument. Give me a match, please.

AARON (*handing matches*). There's only one answer.

LADY MAB. What is it ?

AARON. May I have a look at that pipe ?
(*She gives him the pipe. He puts it in his mouth.*)
And may I trouble you for a light ?

LADY MAB. Aaron, you are being Aaron again.

AARON. May I trouble you for a light ?

LADY MAB (*as she strikes a match*). But this is no answer to argument.

AARON (*smoking*). On the contrary, it is a conclusive answer.

LADY MAB. You're very irrational.

AARON. I am.

LADY MAB. Then when we're married I can't smoke a pipe.

AARON. You *can*, of course, but you won't.

Neither when we're married nor while we're engaged.

LADY MAB. We've been engaged twenty-four hours.

AARON (*looking at his watch*). About.

LADY MAB. And I suppose, darling, all this signifies that you're one of those terrible northern people who always 'begin as they mean to go on.'

AARON. Yes, my sweet. (*Kisses her eyes again.*)

LADY MAB. Well, you've begun. Go on.

AARON. What do you mean ?

LADY MAB. What's the next lesson ? There are always two at least. I know I've a lot to learn. Do go on.

AARON (*hesitating*). Shall I ?

LADY MAB. Of course. There's no danger—we're both so frightfully polite.

AARON. Nothing's more dangerous than too much politeness.

LADY MAB. Now that *is* true ; but you must have learnt it in the Midlands.

AARON. Still, I'll go on, in my affectionate way.

LADY MAB. I *thought* you had something on your mind, darling.

AARON. All this—er—publicity.

LADY MAB. Publicity ? Oh ! That !

AARON. It seemed to me there was a rare lot of publicity last night at the Opera. You and your friends all paying one another visits in your boxes the whole time, and chattering, and waving to each other across the theatre. Mozart simply hadn't a chance.

LADY MAB. But that had nothing to do with our engagement.

AARON. Really ?

LADY MAB. No. We always do that.

AARON. But it was just like a family party—performed in public.

LADY MAB. It *is* a family party. You see, it's we who have put opera on its legs in London.

AARON. Who ?

LADY MAB. My set. Me. About a score of us.

AARON. Oh ! I thought it was Beecham.

LADY MAB. Well, of course he helps. But it's we who have made it the rage. And we must meet and talk.

AARON. Oh ! All right. Only there ought to be two stages, like Barnum and Bailey's.

LADY MAB. Two stages ?

AARON. One for the opera and the other for your restless friends. Simultaneous performance. However, I really didn't mean to mention that. What I had in mind was this morning's newspapers. I see you've got some of them there (*pointing*).

LADY MAB. All of them. I always take in all the London papers.

AARON. Why? I know you'll excuse these questions, seeing that I'm almost a stranger in your set. Why?

LADY MAB. Because I'm usually *in* all of them. You must have noticed that long before you met me.

AARON. No, I didn't. I'd only time for one paper, and I only read the *news* in that.

LADY MAB. But damn it, you delicious old prig, I *am* the news.

AARON. So I'm beginning to see. There are ten photographs of you in this morning's press, and seven of them are different.

LADY MAB. The photographers will never leave me alone. They settle on me like flies on sugar.

AARON. It must cost you a heap of money.

LADY MAB. Not a penny. They take me for nothing. Glad to. They fight for me. In

fact one paper paid me £100 for sitting. (*Quickly.*) Keep calm. I gave the money to Queen Alexandra's Rose Day.

AARON. But look here, my orchid. How did the *Daily Express* get my photograph? My photograph isn't public. (*Pointing to photograph on table.*) That's the only copy in existence.

LADY MAB. Ah! Now we're coming to the point.

AARON. We are.

LADY MAB. I lent it to them. I had to. They promised to return it in two hours, and they did. Don't be shocked. Of course ours was such a lightning engagement, and you're a stranger to my set, as you say. But you'll soon pick up our code. Still, I suppose I ought to have asked you about the photograph first.

AARON. Why didn't you?

LADY MAB. Because I knew you'd never agree. You love me to be honest, don't you?

AARON. Appears to me that I'm engaged to a public institution.

LADY MAB. That's just it. You are. I'm a public institution. Oh, my Aaron! Do get me out of it. Do save me. I hate it, really. It's not my fault. I don't know how it's happened. It came gradually. It began when I was eighteen, after father and mother died, and I took rooms in this hotel and had them furnished according to my own ideas. From that moment I couldn't blow my nose without the affair getting into the *Daily Mirror*. Things might have been different if dad hadn't been a marquis, and if he hadn't owned coal royalties, and if I hadn't had most marvellous eyes. But as it was, I was a marked woman. You understand now, don't you? If the use of my handkerchief is an event, what must my engagement be? Why, my engagement has knocked the Peace Treaty all to bits. What the wedding will be like I cannot imagine. I suppose it will have to be at St. Margaret's.

AARON. The wedding will be at a registry office, probably in Camden Town, and the witnesses will be the charwoman of the registry office and the first loafer I meet in the street.

LADY MAB. How heavenly! . . . See! All these telegrams. Congratulations on my engagement! I opened about ten. Then I got tired. See! (*She picks up all the telegrams, opened and*

unopened, and throws them over him.) Bless you !
How many telegrams have you had ?

AARON. Oh ! About one. From a fellow at the nitrate works in Cheshire.

LADY MAB. How splendid to be as unknown as you are !

AARON. Even you don't know me, yet.

LADY MAB. Teach me to know you.

AARON. I will. Pick up all these telegrams, please.

LADY MAB. I'll ring.

AARON (*persuasively*). No, no, don't ring. Pick them up. You threw them about.

LADY MAB. You help me.

AARON. When you've picked up twenty, I'll do the rest. Go on. (*She obeys.*) And while you're on your knees, there's just one more thing. (*Lady Mab looks up at him with a plaintive glance. He breaks off and adopts a caressing, apologetic air.*) I say, you don't *mind* me blazing away like this ?

LADY MAB. I love having my soul saved. Please do proceed.

AARON. I felt sure you wouldn't mind. You told me about my necktie yesterday, and so I thought I might touch lightly on one or two little matters to-day. Then we should be starting fair.

LADY MAB. Your necktie to-day is adorable. Well ?

AARON. Well, it's about this spiritualist business. I think if you're wise you'll drop it.

LADY MAB. Spiritualist business ? You mean Procopo.

AARON. I mean Mr. Procopo.

LADY MAB. But I've put Procopo on the map. No dinner-party is complete without him. You must meet him. He's astounding. He'll convince you.

AARON. Convince me of what ?

LADY MAB. Well, you know, it's not what you'd call spiritualism at all. It's the mystery

of personality that Procopo specializes in—personal consciousness, the nature of individuality, and that sort of thing. He studied it in the East. Of course you've heard of multiple personality.

AARON. Only in politics—Prime Ministers with an unreliable majority having to be all things to all men, and that sort of thing.

LADY MAB. Will you be serious?

AARON. I certainly will.

LADY MAB. 'There *are* authenticated cases of multiple personality.

AARON. Two or more distinct personalities in one body?

LADY MAB. Yes.

AARON. I don't believe it.

LADY MAB. Then I must ask you to read that book there, by Sidis and Goodhart. It's a classic.

AARON. And who are Sidis and Goodhart?
(*fingering book*).

LADY MAB. Sidis is a professor at Harvard and Goodhart is a professor at Yale. Both of them very well-known psychologists.

AARON (*slightly dashed*). Oh !

LADY MAB. Procopo lent me that book.

AARON. And how many personalities has Procopo got ?

LADY MAB. Oh ! He's quite normal himself. Quite normal. You'll see. But he has carried the investigation much further. Procopo claims that individualities can be exchanged between bodies.

AARON. How ?

LADY MAB. By means of hypnotic suggestion—and other faculties of his own.

AARON. Is he supposed to be a hypnotist ?

LADY MAB. His hypnotic powers are unquestionable.

AARON. Could he turn you into me and me into you ?

LADY MAB. Ah! You mustn't go to extremes. Besides, he expressly says no individuality is transferable to the opposite sex.

AARON. Well, that's some relief, anyway. But do you seriously assert that Procopo seriously asserts that he could put your mind into some other woman's body, and some other woman's mind into yours?

LADY MAB. Yes.

AARON. Complete. Memory, associations, and all?

LADY MAB. Yes. Everything. Why, it's been done several times in India within the last few years!

AARON. But India's several thousand miles off.

LADY MAB. He's offered to make an experiment on me, here.

AARON. He'd better not.

LADY MAB. Why?

AARON. I wouldn't have you altered even the slightest bit for anything.

LADY MAB (*rising and going to him, gratefully*). Oh, Aaron! I'm so glad. You've given me back my confidence. (*Handing him telegrams which she has picked up.*) Here are twenty. Count them if you like.

AARON. Now it's my turn (*moving*).

LADY MAB. No, don't move. (*She sits on his knee. Persuasively.*) But I assure you Procopo really is unique. You've only got to go into the matter and you'd see at once that we're on the eve of marvellous discoveries in the psychology of consciousness.

AARON. I *have* been going into the matter, and we *are* on the eve of marvellous discoveries.

LADY MAB. What?

AARON. The editor of *Truth* will publish an article about your Procopo's past next week.

LADY MAB. The editor of *Truth*? Aaron, you aren't a journalist, are you?

AARON. No. But when I was in the Army *Truth* ventilated some of our grievances for us. That's how I came to know the editor. And he's been telling me about Procopo.

LADY MAB. What about Procopo ?

AARON. Nine years ago Procopo got fourteen days for common fortune-telling at Birmingham. That's your Procopo. *Truth* has obtained photographs and a full transcript of the evidence given at the police-court. Next Tuesday the great Procopo bubble will burst. And I don't want my Mab to suffer in the explosion.

LADY MAB. But is this true ?

AARON. It's as true as my knee (*jogging her*).

LADY MAB (*rising suddenly*). Oh ! Aaron ! Give me up.

AARON. Give you up ?

LADY MAB. I'm no good. I always knew I was no good.

AARON. Have *you* been in prison too ?

LADY MAB. My caste is no good. We're done for, we aristocrats. To be the daughter of a marquis nowadays is simply damnation. I've tried. I've tried to live it down. But I can't. Cabinet Ministers flatter me and tell me their secrets, but I'm no good. Great painters paint me, but I'm no good. And they aren't either, when I've done with them. I'm right in the middle of the swim, all the swims, but I'm no good. I'm the idol of the picture-papers, but I'm no good. There's something queer in me. Oh! If only Procopo was genuine after all! Wouldn't I be changed into somebody else! Somebody in Birmingham, perhaps! Yes, and wouldn't I like to see somebody else messing up my job! Throw me away, Aaron! I shall never make you happy. I'm too frightfully clever to be anything but a fool. Throw me away! (*She clings to him.*)

AARON (*seizing large flower-glass*). I'll throw this water over you if you get hysterical. Kiss me, my box-of-tricks.

LADY MAB. You take all the responsibility, then?

AARON. What of?

LADY MAB. Not throwing me away.

AARON. I do. (*They kiss.*)

LADY MAB (*moving away and gazing at him*).
I'm sorry for you, Aaron.

Enter Waiter.

WAITER. A lady with two typewriting machines, my lady.

LADY MAB. Oh! Bother! And Kitty isn't here.

AARON. Who's Kitty?

LADY MAB. You know Miss Crane.

AARON. Oh! Your doormat.

LADY MAB. My secretary. She's ill. Aaron, choose a typewriter for me. My old one's worn out. Every one said typewriters couldn't be had, so I ordered one to be here by noon to-day. And here it is. That's me. What I want I get.

AARON. But I don't know anything about typewriters.

LADY MAB. Neither do I. Now, you've taken all responsibilities, Aaron. This is the first of them. I can't talk to typewriter girls to-day. I'll go and swallow some aspirin.

AARON. And supposing I choose a machine you don't like and Kitty Crane doesn't like ?

LADY MAB. What I like Kitty likes, and what you like I like. If Kitty's my doormat, I'm yours. I'm determined to be your doormat. How sick I am of being a silly capricious aristocrat. Bully me ! Wipe your feet on me.

AARON. Go at once and swallow your aspirin.

Lady Mab goes slavishly to the door, and then suddenly turns round and makes a charming insubordinate grimace at Aaron, who moves towards the door.

Exit Lady Mab.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

TIME : *The same morning.*

Blanche and Edith are arranging two typewriting machines.

BLANCHE (*with a Lancashire accent*). Let be ! Let be ! I'll take th' covers off. And you can take yeself off, my girl. You've done your little bit.

EDITH (*with a Cockney accent*). Can't I stay and see you sell a machine, Miss Nixon ?

BLANCHE. No, Miss Tunnicliff, that ye cannot, and well ye know it. Ye're wanted back at th' shop this minute.

EDITH. How do you get round them, Miss Nixon ?

BLANCHE. I study 'em. I study their fads. I find out what pleases 'em. Ye never know if summat won't lead to summat else. I'm all for summat else. And when I've found out a bit what pleases 'em, I make 'em think it pleases

me too, and then I let fly, in a manner of speaking. But it isn't as easy as all that, neither. So you needn't think it. (*Picking up book.*) 'Multiple Personality,' Sidis and Goodhart. Oh my! (*Picking up a pamphlet.*) 'Procopo.' Oh my! 'A theory of the exchange of individualities.' Bless us! (*To Edith.*) Off with ye! (*As Edith is going.*) Hey!

EDITH. Yes, Miss Nixon?

BLANCHE. Which machine does th' boss want me to plant on her ladyship?

EDITH. The Conquest. There's several people after the Imperials.

BLANCHE. Art sure? Th' Conquest. Not th' Imperial?

EDITH. No. The Conquest.

BLANCHE. Well, th' old Conquest 'll want a bit of selling at sixty-five guineas. It wasna' born yesterday, nor yet seven years ago. It's a profiteer at sixty-five guineas, th' old Conquest is. You can politely 'ook it, miss. Here (*giving her money*), ye can buy a packet of chocolates in th' Tube. Save me three on 'em.

EDITH. Thank you, Miss Nixon. (*Exit.*)
(*Blanche takes the covers off the two machines.*)

Enter Aaron.

AARON. Good morning.

BLANCHE (*with a correct London accent*). Good morning.

AARON. So these are the typewriters. Lady Mab Infold is unable to see you this morning, and her secretary is not available, and so she's asked me to try what I can do in the matter.

BLANCHE. Certainly.

AARON. What makes have you brought ?

BLANCHE. I've brought an Imperial and a Conquest. Two of the best modern machines.

AARON. Ah, yes.

BLANCHE. Do you know anything about typewriters ?

AARON (*somewhat taken aback*). No. But I'm a business man.

BLANCHE. I feel sure you'll pardon my question. It saves so much trouble in the end. Then, if I may, I'll just explain to you the points of the Imperial.

AARON. One moment. I should like to ask you something first.

BLANCHE. Please do. I'm here to give all information.

AARON. I understand there's a serious shortage of typewriting machines ?

BLANCHE. Very serious indeed. There are no new machines on the market. . . . Owing to the war, of course.

AARON. Your firm can get practically any price it likes for second-hand machines ?

BLANCHE. *We* have to pay practically any price for old machines that we hear of for sale.

AARON. The demand far exceeds the supply ?

BLANCHE. Very far. We have, perhaps, three or four earnest applicants for every machine we can offer.

AARON. Then how comes it that your firm is ready to put itself to the trouble of actually sending two machines here for Lady Mab to choose from ? Because, according to you, there are half a dozen people waiting anxiously in your shop to buy these very machines. Where is your advantage ? Pardon the question. I'm merely asking as a business man.

BLANCHE. Well, I feel sure that as a business man you'll understand me perfectly when I say that I happen to be selling typewriters—not buying them.

AARON (*hit, but smiling*). I understand you perfectly.

BLANCHE. Of course, I needn't point out that the demand for typewriters won't always exceed the supply, and that we like to secure good new customers. Lady Mab Infold would be a very good customer.

AARON. Do you expect her ladyship to buy a new machine every month ?

BLANCHE. No. Perhaps one every five years or so.

AARON. Then why should she be a better customer than anybody else ?

BLANCHE. Because she's Lady Mab Infold.

AARON. How odd !

BLANCHE. It is. (*They look at each other.*) But so true ! Now if you'll allow me to show you this Imperial.

AARON. Why not the Conquest ?

BLANCHE (*feigning reluctance*). Certainly, if you wish.

AARON. No. We'll begin with the Imperial.

BLANCHE (*sitting down to the machine and removing her gloves*). The Imperial has thirty keys and two shift keys. You see (*taps*). Producing eighty-eight characters. Back space for corrections (*taps*). Tabulator for figure work. The tabulator is built in. Automatic ruling. Disappearing pointer. You see. Now you'll notice one interesting thing—practically the whole of the mechanism is covered in.

AARON. What's the point of that ?

BLANCHE. Keeps out the dust you make when you're using the eraser. Of course, if Lady Mab Infold has a miraculous typist who never makes a mistake there isn't much point in having the mechanism covered in. But, believe me, dust from the eraser does more harm to the machine than any amount of banging.

AARON. What is the price of this machine ?

BLANCHE. Seventy guineas.

AARON. You're not serious ?

BLANCHE. I'm afraid I am.

AARON. But I bought a first-rate typewriter myself in 1916 for twenty-five pounds.

BLANCHE. Yes, but peace hadn't been declared then.

AARON (*turning to the other machine*). How much is the Conquest ?

BLANCHE (*negligently*). Sixty-five guineas. It's an older machine. May I just type something for you on the Imperial ? (*Taking paper from packet and inserting it in the machine.*) Will you

dictate something ? Anything. The more difficult the better. Perhaps something from that book there might do. If it's a novel the dialogue would enable me to show you how quickly the column selector works.

AARON (*picking up book*). It isn't a novel.

BLANCHE. Never mind.

AARON (*reading*). 'Psychophysiological dissociation is at the basis—of the psychopathic states of functional psychosis.' (*Blanche types.*) Got it ?

BLANCHE (*snatching the paper from the machine and handing it to him*). Very clear, isn't it ? Is it correct ?

AARON (*looking at the paper*). Some machine !

BLANCHE. Forgive my curiosity. But is that Sidis and Goodhart's book on 'Multiple Personality' ?

AARON (*startled*). It is.

BLANCHE. Extraordinarily interesting, is it not ?

AARON. I'm told so.

BLANCHE (*taking the paper*). Now I will show you the unique device by which the paper can be re-inserted in the exact position it was in before I took it out. Will you continue dictating?

AARON. I think we'll try the Conquest now.

BLANCHE (*feigning reluctance*). With pleasure. But there is no comparison between the two machines. I haven't half explained the devices on the Imperial yet. For instance, the two-colour ribbon attachment——

AARON. I seem to like the look of the Conquest.

BLANCHE. The Conquest also is an excellent machine, but, as I say——

AARON. Shall we try it?

BLANCHE (*turning to the other machine unwillingly*). Willingly.

At this point Lady Mab enters unperceived. She evidently meant to interrupt, but she stops at the door and listens. The other two do not notice her.

AARON. I'll dictate. (Blanche *inserts the paper. He dictates.*) 'The phenomena of multiple personality are full of meaning and import. Far from being mere freaks of consciousness they are in fact shown to be necessary manifestations of the very constitution of mental life. Multiple consciousness is not the exception but the law——' (*He stops.*)

BLANCHE (*having finished typing*). Rather disturbing, is it not ? But how deeply suggestive !

AARON. These things interest you ?

BLANCHE. I've always been very passionately interested in psychic phenomena.

AARON (*dryly*). Well, what are the points of the Conquest ?

BLANCHE. Oh ! It has the usual points.

AARON. But its special points ?

Exit Lady Mab.

BLANCHE. It has a reputation for reliability and for being rather well balanced. You see, the keys come up easily. Now the Imperial——

AARON. Is sixty-five really the lowest for this Conquest ?

BLANCHE. Really ! . . .

AARON. Pounds ?

BLANCHE. Guineas.

AARON. Well, I always decide quickly. I'll take the Conquest for Lady Mab.

BLANCHE (*Lancashire accent*). 'Swelt me bob !
(*London accent*.) I beg your pardon.

AARON (*Lancashire accent*). Ye're a Lancashire wench, then ?

BLANCHE (*Lancashire accent*). I am that !
(*London accent*.) I beg your pardon.

AARON. I doubt ye're from Wigan.

BLANCHE. Nay, nay ! I'm no Wigan wench. I'm from Warrington, I am. We mak' nowt o' Wigan down Warrington way. Not as I'd wish to insult ye, if ye're from Wigan yeself. Fancy us two Lancashire folk doin' the la-di-dah all this time and not knowing we was Lancashire.

AARON (*London accent*). Well, I don't happen to be a Lancashire man really ; but I had several years before the war on a big works near Wigan, and one picks up the accent from the men.

BLANCHE (*Lancashire accent*). Ye've picked it up right well.

AARON (*London accent*). Not as well as you've picked up a town accent.

BLANCHE (*Lancashire accent*). Eh, I've got three accents at me command. There's th' schoo childer's accent. I used to be in th' teaching line. 'Please, teacher, me mother says I must go home early to-day because father's got three boils back o' th' neck, and he's sittin' in th' kitchen and he wants me by him for rubbin'.' And then there's the educated accent of the district—that was mine. 'No, Mary Elizabeth. I can't let ye go because ye say yer father's got three boils on his neck. Yer mother should have written me a note.' (*London accent*.) And then there's the accent that I sell typewriters with in the West End.

AARON (*London accent*). Well, I'm always delighted to hear a bit of Lancashire again.

BLANCHE (*London accent*). I am, too. Perhaps more than you are. And because I'm so pleased may I say something confidential to you ?

AARON. Oh ! Do.

BLANCHE. You've bought the wrong typewriter. The Imperial's by far the best value.

AARON. Is it ? Well, may I say something confidential to *you* ?

BLANCHE. Oh ! Do.

AARON. I chose the Conquest simply because I saw you were so determined to sell the Imperial.

BLANCHE. Not at all. I was determined to sell the Conquest, and I did.

AARON. Then why did you insist so much on the other one ?

BLANCHE. Because you said you were a business man. I knew you wouldn't be happy if you couldn't see through me. You must oblige me by taking the Imperial, and I'll let you have it

at sixty-five, which was the real price. I always put a bit on, on the chance.

AARON. But why this benevolence ?

BLANCHE (*smiling*). It's for the sake of the old Lancashire accent.

Enter Lady Mab.

LADY MAB (*to Blanche*). Good morning. I'm Lady Mab's confidential secretary. Her ladyship is lying down, and I couldn't leave her before. (*Aaron, flabbergasted, drops into a chair.*)

BLANCHE. I'm sorry to hear her ladyship is not well.

LADY MAB (*to Aaron*). Her ladyship hopes you have bought a typewriter.

BLANCHE (*firmly and significantly, with a glance at Aaron, who is still dumb from the effects of Lady Mab's imposture*). Yes. This gentleman has decided on the Imperial here. The price was seventy guineas. But I have arranged to take sixty-five, under the circumstances.

LADY MAB. Oh ! Indeed ! (*To Aaron.*) Her

ladyship wishes me to say that she would expect you to dinner to-night at eight.

AARON. But——

LADY MAB (*firmly and significantly*). She much regrets that you can't stay longer this morning.

AARON (*jumping up, rather resentfully, to go*). Yes. I must be off. (*To Blanche.*) Good morning.

BLANCHE. *Good morning.*

LADY MAB. Good morning, Mr. Draper.

Exit Aaron.

BLANCHE. I didn't know who I was talking to. So that is Mr. Draper.

LADY MAB (*very amicably and alluringly*). It is.

BLANCHE. That Lady Mab's engaged to ?

LADY MAB. Yes. What do you think of

him ? (Blanche, *rather startled, remains silent.*)
I love him.

BLANCHE. Do you ?

LADY MAB. Well, you know what I mean.

BLANCHE. Yes, of course. He's very—er—
trenchant, as one might say.

LADY MAB (*eagerly*). Yes, isn't he ? That's
what I like about him. I think that's what
Lady Mab likes, too.

BLANCHE. I'd never heard of him till I
happened to see his name in the paper this
morning. At first when I met him here I thought
he must be a steam-hammer manufacturer or
something. And yet he's very *nice* with it.

LADY MAB. Oh, no. He's got nothing to do
with iron or steel. He's what they call a chemist.
Not pills and prescriptions. No. He's with
Polk, Schweitz and Co. They have several big
works, you know, in Lancashire and Cheshire.

BLANCHE. Oh ! The German firm.

LADY MAB. Swiss.

BLANCHE. Oh, yes.

LADY MAB. When he came home wounded the War Office wouldn't let him return to the Front. Polks were going in for poison gas, and he was wanted—chemistry, you know. I suppose Mr. Draper's responsible for killing more Germans than any other ten men in England.

BLANCHE. More than the old gentlemen who kept on writing to the papers about self-sacrifice ?

LADY MAB. I was forgetting them. Of course, they won the war.

BLANCHE. I expect that Lady Mab and Mr. Draper have known each other since childhood.

LADY MAB. No. They only met about two months ago. In a lift at the Piccadilly Hotel.

BLANCHE. How exciting ! And he went mad about her at once ?

LADY MAB (*reflectively*). No. She went mad about him.

BLANCHE. She must be very courageous.

LADY MAB. She has the courage of her opinions. I'll say that for her.

BLANCHE. But did she get herself introduced to him or what ? It's so interesting to know how these things are done in the best circles.

LADY MAB. She happened to be in the lift with her uncle, the present Marquis, who is always sitting on House of Lords Committees and things, and he'd met Mr. Draper in some inquiry about the accounts of the Trench Warfare Department. So it was easy.

BLANCHE. Every one's very surprised at it.

LADY MAB. At the engagement ?

BLANCHE. Yes.

LADY MAB. Why ?

BLANCHE. Well, we all took it for granted she'd marry some one very famous—perhaps a Prince.

LADY MAB. With Lady Mab you can take nothing for granted. That's her virtue.

BLANCHE. But Mr. Draper is nobody, *really*.

LADY MAB. How do you mean—nobody? He's a cousin of the Earl of Ross.

BLANCHE. Oh! Then that explains it. I thought there must be something.

LADY MAB. No, it doesn't explain it. She didn't know for at least a fortnight after she'd met him.

BLANCHE. How thrilling it must be to be confidential secretary to some one like Lady Mab.

LADY MAB. You can have it.

BLANCHE (*surprised*). Is that so? Well, of course, it must cost you a lot for clothes.

LADY MAB (*at a loss for a moment; then, comprehending*). Oh, I see. You mean these. She gives me all the clothes she's tired of. They fit me.

BLANCHE. And evidently she's soon tired of them.

LADY MAB (*in a new tone*). I say—may I ask your name?

BLANCHE. Blanche Nixon.

LADY MAB. Miss ?

BLANCHE. Oh, quite.

LADY MAB. Well, Miss Nixon. You said just now you were very interested in the question of multiple personality.

BLANCHE. Did I ?

LADY MAB. Yes, to Mr. Draper.

BLANCHE. Did you hear us talking ?

LADY MAB. I came into the room. But you two were so busy over the typewriter you didn't notice me and I went out again.

BLANCHE. I hope the machine will please you.

LADY MAB (*impatiently*). Oh ! I don't care a button about the machine.

BLANCHE. But shan't you have to use it ?

LADY MAB (*recovering her mistake*). Yes, yes. But I can use any old machine. How about this

question of multiple personality? Lady Mab also is deeply interested in it—very deeply.

BLANCHE (*with gush*). I think it is more exciting than anything else in the world.

LADY MAB. You have studied it?

BLANCHE. I've read Procopo's pamphlet about the exchange of personalities.

LADY MAB. But Procopo's pamphlet has never been published. It was only issued for private circulation.

BLANCHE. Yes, but you may remember that Lady Mab sent the manuscript to our place to be typewritten for the printers. I copied it. Nobody else in the office could make out the manuscript.

LADY MAB. Really, this is most romantic. (*With a movement towards Blanche.*) You and I seem to be kindred spirits, Miss Nixon.

BLANCHE. How kind of you to say so.

LADY MAB. But we are, aren't we? At first sight.

BLANCHE. I'm convinced of it.

LADY MAB. My name's Crane—Kitty Crane.

BLANCHE. Yes, I know. A charming name.

LADY MAB. How did you know ?

BLANCHE. You wrote to us for Lady Mab about the typewriters.

LADY MAB. Of course I did ! May I talk frankly to you ?

BLANCHE. Oh, please do !

LADY MAB. It's about Lady Mab. You know she and I are more companions than employer and secretary. She tells me everything. . . . She's not at all happy.

BLANCHE. That's her engagement, of course. Girls seldom are happy just after they become engaged. They're apt to lie awake at nights wondering whether they've bitten off more than they can chew—if you understand me.

LADY MAB. Perfectly.

BLANCHE. And I suppose that Lady Mab's like other girls, after all.

LADY MAB. She is, only more so. She's a strange creature.

BLANCHE (*sighs*). We all are, aren't we ?

LADY MAB. She's tried so many things. She's nursed in the war. She's organized dozens of charity fêtes. She plays the piano and the harp. She sings. She paints. She does social work. She even does journalism. She recites. She dances. She writes plays—little ones. She acts——

BLANCHE. But nothing professionally !

LADY MAB. Oh, no. An amateur. And she just hates being an amateur.

BLANCHE. How I know the feeling ! I used to be a regular all-round amateur myself.

LADY MAB. Indeed !

BLANCHE. Yes. I was a school teacher in Warrington.

LADY MAB. Warrington ! Never heard of it !

BLANCHE. I dare say. But Warrington exists. It has schools. I taught in one of them. I had to teach geography, history, spelling, sewing, arithmetic, cookery, some mild religion, manners, hygiene, and twenty other subjects. And I was an amateur in all of them, except possibly combing vermin out of children's hair. Being high up in this business of educating the future mothers of the Imperial race, I got just over two pounds a week, and I only had to work about thirteen hours a day. The Teachers' Union demanded a decent war bonus, and the Borough Education Committee said it couldn't afford the money. When the Borough scavengers struck for four pounds a week and got it—well, I left Warrington and came to London to be a professional, and, by heaven, I am one at last.

LADY MAB. A professional what, you adorable thing ?

BLANCHE. A professional seller of typewriters. . . . I only tell you all this to show that I understand pretty well how Lady Mab feels. But she's rich. I've never had *that* feeling.

LADY MAB. Not so rich. She really spends a

great deal. Never thinks about money. Not interested in it. In spite of her engagement she's haunted all the time by the idea that she hasn't *fulfilled* herself. She wants an *aim*. That's why she's so taken up with these questions of human consciousness, individuality, and so on. That's why she's spent so much on Procopo—making his position.

BLANCHE. *Has* she ?

LADY MAB. Oh, yes. Pretty nearly ruined herself.

BLANCHE. I could do with her sort of ruin.

LADY MAB (*solemnly*). Would you care to meet Procopo ?

BLANCHE. More than anything. He must be marvellous.

LADY MAB. He is astounding ! Come here to-night at nine, and you shall see him. That was what I wanted to ask you. . . . There may be a *séance*.

BLANCHE. But what will Lady Mab say ?

She won't care to have a girl like me here. I'm a stranger.

LADY MAB. She would like a stranger. And Lady Mab's a democrat of democrats, believe me. What's more, I told her what I heard you saying to Mr. Draper, and she immediately asked me to ask you. She's like that. She's sick of her own set.

BLANCHE. But what will happen at the séance ?

LADY MAB (*mysteriously*). Who knows ? Anything may happen.

BLANCHE. I'll come.

LADY MAB. That's sweet of you. Well, to-night at nine, then.

BLANCHE. Thank you. By the way, shall I take the cheque ?

LADY MAB. The cheque ?

BLANCHE. For the typewriter. You see, it's supposed to be a cash transaction, and they're very strict at the office.

LADY MAB (*after a pause*). Certainly. I'll get Lady Mab to sign it at once, if you'll excuse me for a moment. Sixty-five pounds, you said.

BLANCHE. Guineas.

LADY MAB (*at the door*). I'm sure you'll find to-night frightfully interesting. Lady Mab's a bit of a devil. (*Exit.*)

Enter Edith.

EDITH. Please, Miss Nixon, I can't find the way downstairs.

BLANCHE. But the lift's next door.

EDITH. Somehow I daren't ring for it.

BLANCHE (*after staring at her*). Well, put the cover on that typewriter.

EDITH. Yes, Miss Nixon. Then you did the business, Miss Nixon ?

BLANCHE. I did. And I'm waiting for the cheque.

EDITH. And did you find out their fads and what pleases them ?

BLANCHE. I did.

EDITH. And did you make them think it pleased you ?

BLANCHE. I did. And I say, Edith !

EDITH. Yes, Miss Nixon ?

BLANCHE. Perhaps I shan't be at the office to-morrow. It's not sure.

EDITH. Why ?

BLANCHE. Well, as I said when we came in, one thing leads to another. And——

EDITH. Well, Miss Nixon ?

BLANCHE (*with an outburst*). Oh ! I'm more than a bit of a devil, Edith.

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE I

Same scene as Act I

TIME : *The same evening.* Lady Mab and Aaron.

AARON. Look here, Mab, a little madness is a very fine thing, and I wish I had more of it myself ; but this notion knocks spots off the maddest of all your society stunts and crazes. Moreover, it can't possibly succeed. It can't even begin to succeed. No ! Do you seriously think that you can palm off Miss Blanche Nixon as Lady Mab Infold ?

LADY MAB. I don't see why not ?

AARON. Then I will proceed to enlighten you. The chambermaid would have to be squared for a start. You can't square a chambermaid—at least not effectively. The whole hotel would be buzzing with the thing about five minutes after you'd sworn the chambermaid to everlasting secrecy.

LADY MAB. My darling little Aaron, do you seriously think that I am a damned idiot and that I haven't worked out the details ? I shan't square the chambermaid. I shall simply ask the manager—to whom my paths drop fatness—I shall simply ask him to make a transfer of chambermaids and give me one from the seventh floor. That lofty girl won't know me from Eve. She's passed her life on the seventh floor. Happily I never could stand having a maid of my own, and when I've wanted a maid I've always used Kitty Crane. Kitty's away ill. So *she's* safe. The fact is that no place is more private than a very big hotel. Blanche Nixon and I will leave the hotel perfectly openly to-morrow. True, the porters will salute us, but how can any porter be aware that she's me and I'm her secretary ?

AARON. Leave the hotel ? Where are you going to ?

LADY MAB. To Staffordshire, of course, to lay the foundation-stone of that Municipal Health Institute at Bursley the day after to-morrow.

AARON (*astounded*). Miss Nixon as you ; and you as her secretary !

LADY MAB. Such is my intention. I'm hiring

a car, to pick us up at Piccadilly Circus. Safer. We shall sleep at Stafford.

AARON (*after roaring with laughter*). But my divine lunatic, it will be useless for you to try to play the secretary. You'll be recognized at once.

LADY MAB. How ?

AARON. Well, from photographs. The *Daily Mirror* circulates even in Staffordshire.

LADY MAB. Innocent ! Nobody ever recognizes anybody from photographs—at any rate not Press photographs. Did you recognize me when you first met me in the lift ? Did Blanche Nixon recognize me this morning ? The thing's impossible. Blanche Nixon's just about my age and build and complexion, and that's enough. As for me, I shall arrange myself a little for the secretarial rôle in some of Kitty's clothes. Nobody knows me in Bursley. They only asked me to lay the foundation-stone because they knew it would be a good advertisement for their Institute.

AARON. And Procopo is coming to-night to

engineer this enormous swindle? Then he'll have to admit that he's a common fraud.

LADY MAB. Not at all. And I'm not yet convinced that he is a common fraud.

AARON. You were convinced this morning.

LADY MAB. But he came to see me this afternoon, and he's unconvinced me again. Procopo is marvellous. After all, it might have happened to any spiritualist to be sentenced by a pack of provincial magistrates for fortune-telling. Provincial magistrates are just like High Court judges—they love to see themselves in the papers. Procopo was very impressive to-day. He quite seriously believes that he may be able to change the individualities of two bodies, and transfer A's individuality to B's body, and B's individuality to A's body. He's going to make a tremendous experiment to-night, and he actually thinks he'll succeed!

AARON (*humorously warning*). If he did you'd be Blanche Nixon, incidentally.

LADY MAB. No. I should still be *me*, but I should be in Blanche Nixon's body. I should

love it. We'd take a flat at Walham Green and live happily ever after.

AARON. But I don't want to marry Blanche Nixon's body.

LADY MAB. Not with me inside it ?

AARON. No !

LADY MAB. You're a bit difficult. However, you needn't worry. Of course Procopo won't succeed, *really*. But *I* shall succeed.

AARON. What do you mean ?

LADY MAB. You'll admit Procopo can hypnotize.

AARON. Oh, yes. I suppose he can hypnotize all right.

LADY MAB. He will put Blanche Nixon to sleep, and she won't wake up till to-morrow morning ; and when she does wake up she'll find herself in my bed, and what's more in my pyjamas, and I shall go in and talk as if she was Lady Mab and me her secretary, and she'll

believe I think she *is* Lady Mab. Her mind will have been prepared, you see.

AARON. She won't believe any such thing. She's not such a fool. She's jolly clever.

LADY MAB. Yes, she's jolly clever. But she's simply saturated with this theory of the exchange of individualities between bodies—I had two long talks with her—and she'll believe it quick enough. I'm jolly clever, too, in my small way, and didn't I rather accept the theory? All jolly clever people believe something.

AARON. And what about Procopo? He'll be coming along in the morning to see the result of his experiment.

LADY MAB. We shall be gone.

AARON. Mab, you're an unmitigated humbug.

LADY MAB. I'm not—not unmitigated anyhow.

AARON. And how is the affair to end?

LADY MAB. I don't know and I don't care. My motto is—Live dangerously.

AARON. I had enough of living dangerously at Ypres. The thing's bound to come out, and then there'll be a scandal, and how are you going to explain it ?

LADY MAB. Dear youth, if you'd been on the inside of politics as I have, you'd know that anything can be explained.

AARON (*seriously and positively*). Well, I told you this morning I wouldn't permit it. And I will not. Is that clear ?

LADY MAB (*seriously*). Quite. But you will have to permit it. I gave in to you in everything this morning, and do you think I couldn't see you despised me for it ? I'm not going to give in to-night. I've always done what I liked, and everybody's always helped me to do what I liked. And I mean to have one more fling before I settle down. And you're not going to sulk. And you're not going to break off the engagement. You're going to play the game.

AARON (*relenting*). You may well call it "game."

LADY MAB (*with feeling*). It's not a game. It's not a lark. It's more than a lark. You

were all criticism of me this morning ; and I felt it ; and I do want to see whether somebody else, somebody as clever as I am, will be as big a fool as I am in my place. I can't argue any more. Do let me settle down—like a dove on your manly shoulders. You horrid darling !
(*She puts her arms on his shoulders.*)

Enter Waiter.

WAITER. Mr. Procopo is waiting in the hall, my lady. Shall he be shown up ?

AARON. He shall.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

TIME : *The same evening.* Lady Mab,
Blanche, Aaron, and Procopo.

PROCOPO (*at the side of the room*). Is this the lamp switch, dear Miss Crane ?

LADY MAB. Yes.

PROCOPO. And this is the chandelier switch ?

LADY MAB. Yes.

PROCOPO. Bolt the door, please. (Lady Mab bolts the door.)

PROCOPO (*to Blanche*). Listen to me.

BLANCHE (*with an appearance of ecstasy*). I am listening.

PROCOPO. You agree to this experiment ?

BLANCHE. Willingly. Eagerly.

PROCOPO. You know I do not guarantee its success ?

BLANCHE. I do.

PROCOPO. You know that if the experiment succeeds your soul will issue from its present body and inhabit another ?

BLANCHE. Yes, yes. Lady Mab's.

PROCOPO. It may be. You can conceive and foresee the inconveniences of the change. You accept them ? All of them ?

BLANCHE. Inconveniences of Lady Mab's body and identity ?

PROCOPO. Yes.

BLANCHE. I accept them gladly.

PROCOPO. I warn you that if the experiment succeeds you yourself will probably be unaware of any bodily change. While others see you in the flesh of Lady Mab, you will look in the glass and see what you imagine to be Blanche Nixon. This unawareness of any bodily change on your part will be due to the absolute perfection of the adjustment between the soul and the new body.

BLANCHE. Oh! . . . But surely, as Miss Crane here is to see the experiment she will know when it is over that I am really Blanche Nixon in Lady Mab's body, and things may be a little awkward. As for Mr. Draper——

PROCOPO. Child, do not attempt to instruct me. Everything has been thought of. Later, I shall put Miss Crane to sleep, and erase from her mind all memory of to-night.

BLANCHE. I beg pardon.

PROCOPO. In all that I have told you I am assuming, of course, the complete success of the experiment. There is an alternative. The experiment may fail completely. In which case no change whatever will occur, and everything will remain as it now is. (*More sternly.*) There is another alternative. The experiment may succeed, but only partially. In which case, at the worst, a soul—perhaps two souls—may be rendered homeless. Do you of your own free will face such a possibility?

BLANCHE (*with a courageous air*). I do.

PROCOPO. Are you ready?

BLANCHE. I should like to ask two questions. Miss Crane told me when I came in that Lady Mab was already asleep under your influence.

PROCOPO. Ah ! Miss Crane told you that ?

BLANCHE. Where is Lady Mab now ? I have not seen her.

PROCOPO (*sternly*). And why should you see her ? It is essential that you should not see her. As to her position in space, it has no relevance. We are about to quit the material world of three dimensions.

BLANCHE. I understand.

PROCOPO. Your second question ?

BLANCHE. Will the experiment, if it succeeds, have a permanent result, or shall I eventually return to my own body ? If so, when ?

PROCOPO (*more sternly*). Who can tell ? I cannot. I am only a seeker. We are challenging the most mysterious and terrible phenomena. You are afraid ?

BLANCHE. No. I am not.

PROCOPO. Then are you ready ?

BLANCHE. Yes.

PROCOPO. Go and lie down on the sofa.
(*Blanche obeys.*) Put your arms by your sides.
Are you comfortable ?

BLANCHE. Yes.

PROCOPO (*moving to the switches*). First I shall put you into a hypnotic sleep. (*He turns off the chandelier light, making the room quite dark. He then turns on a small shaded lamp over the head of the sofa.*) Gaze steadily at the lamp above your head. (*He approaches the sofa.*) Gaze steadily. Steadily. Sleep. (*He makes passes.*) Sleep. Do not rebel, for I will not have it. Sleep. Slip gently imperceptibly into unconsciousness. Your eyes are closing. They are shut. You are in the pre-hypnoidal state. (*A pause.*) Listen. You will not awake until to-morrow morning in full daylight. (*He turns away from her.*) She is asleep.

LADY MAB. Already ?

PROCOPO. I have never failed to produce

hypnosis in a normal subject. Which is your bedroom ?

LADY MAB. *My* bedroom ?

PROCOPO (*with emphasis*). The secretary's bedroom, Miss Crane.

LADY MAB (*pointing L.*). Here.

PROCOPO. Go and light the bed-lamp—the bed-lamp only—and prepare the bed for the night. Go ! I will deal with you afterwards.

Exit Lady Mab.

PROCOPO (*to Aaron*). I shall not have strength to spare to put a third person to sleep, even if you consented to submit to hypnosis——

AARON (*interrupting*). Which I do not.

PROCOPO. I therefore count upon you to forget utterly all that you are witnessing to-night. Indeed I only consented to your presence on that understanding. For a chance word from you to-morrow to either of these ladies might bring incalculable consequences.

AARON. That's all right. I'll say this for you ; you're a fraud, but you're a pretty impressive fraud.

PROCOPO (*calmly*). The experiment will take eight hours to complete. Until-to-morrow morning you have not the least right to assume that I am even a failure, to say nothing of a fraud.

AARON. But, my friend, you're being a fraud all the time.

PROCOPO (*mildly*). How ?

AARON. In pretending to Miss Nixon that Lady Mab is only Lady Mab's secretary. You're carrying on quite solemnly the hoax that Lady Mab began in mere fun.

PROCOPO (*with a pitying smile*). My dear sir, I beg you not to confuse trifles with fundamentals. The harmless and justifiable imposture practised upon Miss Nixon first by the admirable Lady Mab, and then by me at Lady Mab's urgent request, is quite foreign to my experiment. It may just possibly help the experiment, for the reason that success is more likely if Miss Nixon remains ignorant of the physical identity of the body into which she is to pass. But the

little imposture is on an entirely different plane from my sublime experiment. And no truly logical mind could argue from the one to the other.

AARON. Indeed !

PROCOPO. You're a chemist, I believe.

AARON. Yes.

PROCOPO. Therefore a man of science.

AARON. I hope so.

PROCOPO (*dispassionately*). Then act like a man of science. I am confronting you with phenomena as to which your ignorance is evidently complete. The greatest men of science have hitherto in such circumstances adopted an attitude of humility, of caution, of agnosticism if you like ; but they have never dogmatized, for dogmatism is vanity. To call me a fraud at this stage is mere dogmatism, worthy of a superstitious savage, unworthy of a man of science.

Enter Lady Mab.

LADY MAB. Everything is ready.

AARON (*to* Procopo). Go ahead.

PROCOPO (*turning to* Blanche). In your sleep can you hear me distinctly?

BLANCHE. Yes.

PROCOPO. Your body will stay with you yet awhile. But forget it. Dissociate yourself from it. Loosen gently the bonds of that flesh. Seek quietly the fourth dimension. Do no more. Do not attempt to help me, for you cannot. I am the master, and you are the captive. Open your eyes. (*Blanche does so.*) Now that you have opened your eyes you are still asleep. Answer.

BLANCHE (*dreamily*). Yes.

PROCOPO. When I raise my hand high—not before—rise from the sofa. Go into the room which I have in mind. Undress. Get into bed. Turn out the lamp. And forget everything except what I have told you. You can hear nothing. You can see nothing except my hand. (*To* Lady Mab.) Miss Crane, as soon as Miss Nixon has left the sofa you will be good enough to take her place and your part in the experiment.

Procopo *turns to Blanche and raises his hand, high. Blanche rises.*

Blanche *goes towards door, L., somnambulistically, and Lady Mab takes her place. As Blanche passes Aaron, who is now standing near the door, she deliberately winks at him.*

BLANCHE (*murmuring in Lancashire accent to Aaron as she winks*). I'm fair in it.

Aaron *gives a gesture and instantly controls himself.*

CURTAIN

SCENE III

TIME : *The next morning. Breakfast is served.*

Lady Mab, in a secretary's frock, is arranging letters and newspapers on an occasional table near the breakfast-table.

Enter Blanche, in a magnificent dressing-gown, of which her gestures show her appreciation.

BLANCHE (*secretly nervous*). Well, what's to-day's programme, Kitty my girl ?

LADY MAB (*blenching under the familiarity ; then with great gaiety*). Good morning, m—my lady. Well, nothing, except, of course, that we have to leave in the car at a quarter to eleven this morning *en route* for Bursley for the foundation-stone laying to-morrow.

BLANCHE (*weakly*). Ah, yes. The foundation-stone laying.

LADY MAB. Nothing but travelling to-day, unless, of course, your ladyship wants to go through your speech. It's being greatly looked forward to—I know that.

BLANCHE (*staggered, but controlling herself*). You're very gay. What is being greatly looked forward to ?

LADY MAB (*with continued good humour*). Your speech, my lady.

[NOTE. Lady Mab is, of course, throughout pretending ignorance of the fact that Blanche is not Lady Mab : but she is not aware that Blanche is aware of this pretence, and that Blanche is all the time out-deceiving her deception. The acting of the parts should emphasize the reality of the situation to the audience by means of gestures and intonations.]

BLANCHE. The deuce it is ! (*With resolution.*) Well, when I have delivered it, it will be greatly looked back upon, believe me.

LADY MAB. Your ladyship told me to order a car to meet us at Piccadilly Circus, as you wished to avoid reporters seeing you off, if possible.

BLANCHE. To avoid reporters ? Quite right. Quite right.

LADY MAB. But I've been thinking—what

about the luggage? How are we to get it to Piccadilly Circus without taking a taxi from here, which would excite remark?

BLANCHE. Take a taxi here! Certainly not. I want to sneak out. You must order another car to come here for the luggage and let it go direct to Staffordshire. Quite simple.

LADY MAB (*suddenly less gay*). Very expensive—two cars all the way to Staffordshire.

BLANCHE (*benevolently*). What do I care? Let money circulate.

LADY MAB (*somewhat serious*). But your ladyship knows——

BLANCHE. Yes, she knows.

LADY MAB (*with forced good humour*). Here are the newspapers.

BLANCHE. I don't want to see the papers.

LADY MAB. But your ladyship always begins with the papers.

BLANCHE (*solemnly*). Kitty, you forget that everything is changed.

LADY MAB. Changed ?

BLANCHE. Yes. I'm engaged. And I can only think of one thing—my beloved Aaron.

LADY MAB (*startled*). Er—yes.

BLANCHE. But you might just see what the end of the *Daily Mail* serial is to-day. We had a bet at the office—(*correcting herself*)—the Foreign Office. (Lady Mab *semi-hysterically snatches up the 'Daily Mail.'*) About Enid, the heroine.

LADY MAB (*reading unevenly*). 'The baronet stood on the steps of his club in the darkness, gnashing his teeth.'

BLANCHE. Thank God he was foiled ! (*Sitting down to eat.*) Come along, Kitty, do swallow something. You look terribly pale.

LADY MAB (*obeying. As she sits*). Now the impromptus—(*taking up some notes*).

BLANCHE. The impromptus ?

LADY MAB. The impromptus for the day. As your ladyship usually prepares them before

doing anything else, so as to be on the safe side, I thought——

BLANCHE. Of course, my famous impromptus. Have you got anything for me ?

LADY MAB. Well, I think this might be useful. Some one said it to Lloyd George, but it hasn't got about yet. 'The nineteenth century was the transfer of the vote. The twentieth will be the transfer of profit.' Sums up two hundred years of politics, don't you think ?

BLANCHE (*airily*). Not bad ! Some one's bound to ask me what I think of the Labour situation. Then I shall say : 'I'll tell you in ten words. (*As if memorizing to herself.*) Nineteenth—vote. Twentieth—profit. Nineteenth—vote. Twentieth—profit. Anything else ?

LADY MAB. Well, here's a good story : 'There once was an old lady who didn't like green peas, and she said : "I'm glad I don't like green peas because if I liked them I should eat them, and I don't like them."' '

BLANCHE (*laughing*). Very funny. But, you know, I don't see the point.

LADY MAB. Neither do I. But men seem to see it. And it's so useful because you can change 'green peas' to simply anything. For instance, when coffee is served you can say, 'Have you ever heard the story about the old lady who didn't like coffee?'

BLANCHE. Could I work it into my speech?

LADY MAB. Of course, my lady.

BLANCHE. Well, no, perhaps I'd better keep it for an impromptu. It's a great impromptu. Anything else?

LADY MAB. I've found the finest mine of impromptus that ever was—'The Note-Books of Samuel Butler.'

BLANCHE. Samuel Butler? Have I heard of him?

LADY MAB. I should say probably not. Nobody has. Here's a thing on marriage. Butler was in the East, and some Mohammedan asked him his opinion about the advantages of marriage compared with the advantages of the—er—other thing. And Butler replied: 'In England, oh my brother, we have a great high-

priest called the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Archbishop of Canterbury once said: "It is cheaper to buy the milk than to keep a cow." "

BLANCHE (*solemnly*). Kitty, have you forgotten that I'm *engaged* to be married?

LADY MAB (*still gay*). Ah! But, my lady, you've got your reputation for cynicism to keep up. That story would help it.

BLANCHE. So it would. . . . I think that'll be enough impromptus for one day.

LADY MAB (*turning to the day's letters*). Shall we go through the letters then? (*Tearing open a packet.*) Here are the press-cuttings.

BLANCHE (*taking them indifferently, and glancing at them*). I don't think I'll bother with these green things.

LADY MAB (*with astonished hilarity*). Not read your press-cuttings, my lady! (*Calmly.*) Very well. (*She begins to cut envelopes open.*)

BLANCHE. What are you doing, my good girl?

LADY MAB. Don't I always open your letters for you ?

BLANCHE. Yes. But I keep on reminding you that I'm engaged now, and obviously things are not quite the same. Give me the letters. (*She begins to open the letters herself. While doing so, she continues talking.*) Curious maid came in to see me this morning. Called me 'miss.'

LADY MAB. Oh ! I'll speak to the manager. But I think the girl's new to this floor. And as I've pointed out to your ladyship before, these little accidents are bound to happen so long as your ladyship absolutely refuses to keep a maid of her own. Not that I've the slightest objection to acting as your ladyship's maid at any time.

BLANCHE (*still glancing at letters*). No maid of my own ! Well, I think I shall get one now, seeing that I'm engaged. I say, has it ever struck you what funny names my friends baptize themselves with ? (*Quoting from letters.*) 'Spoonney,' 'Raffles,' 'Buncles,' 'Old Tom,' 'Darlingest,' 'Mrs. Wiggs,' 'Dearie.' All congratulations ! Oh ! And 'Tuppenny'—no date, no address. Now let me see, who's Tuppenny ?

LADY MAB. The Dowager Duchess of Dorset, my lady, your ladyship's second cousin.

BLANCHE. Of course. Tuppenny, the Dowager Duchess of Dorset. My cousin. Tuppenny. . . . Kitty, I'm not quite myself this morning, am I? Do I look myself?

LADY MAB (*gaily*). Oh! Quite. Why do you ask?

BLANCHE. I don't know. I don't seem to be quite myself. I had a bad night. Memory gone. What did we do last night?

LADY MAB. Nothing. We went rather early to bed.

BLANCHE. So we did. I seem to have had a sort of dream of being carried in the middle of the night from one bed to another.

LADY MAB (*laughing*). Oh! What a funny dream!

BLANCHE. Perhaps it was the pyjamas that upset me. (*As she opens letters.*) Congratulations. Congratulations. Invitation. Congratu-

lations. Invitation. You're sure I've not aged in the night ?

LADY MAB. Not at all.

BLANCHE. Just telephone to Museum one three double six—the typewriting place, you know—and inquire if Miss Blanche Nixon has arrived at business this morning.

LADY MAB (*still laughing*). Oh ! That woman ! Yes. Do you want her to come here ?

BLANCHE. No. I only want to know if she's arrived at business. (*Referring to letters.*) Ah ! Bill. Oh ! Another Bill ! Oh !

LADY MAB (*at telephone*). Museum 1366. Yes, one three double six. . . . Thanks. (*To Blanche.*) Number engaged.

BLANCHE. I thought I heard a voice.

LADY MAB. Only the Exchange.

BLANCHE (*still looking through correspondence*). Well, telephone to Mr. Draper and ask him to come and see me at once, before we start.

LADY MAB. Mr. Draper ?

BLANCHE. My Aaron.

LADY MAB. Perhaps your ladyship forgets that you particularly told him last night he wasn't to come.

BLANCHE. Because it might agitate me for the journey ?

LADY MAB. Well—I'm only repeating what you said, my lady.

BLANCHE. It's sweet of you to remind me, Kitty, but last night was last night, and this morning is this morning. Get me the number and I'll talk to him myself.

LADY MAB (*at telephone*). Mayfair, eleven eleven. Yes, one, one, one, one . . . (*To Blanche.*) Number engaged.

BLANCHE. How queer ! Are odd numbers engaged as well as even ? Kitty, darling, go and bring me my dress, will you, and bring those pyjamas too.

LADY MAB (*still very gay*). The pyjamas ?

BLANCHE. Yes. I want to decide whether they're really fit for the respectable provinces.

LADY MAB. Yes, my lady.

Exit, almost dancing.

BLANCHE (*at telephone*). Mayfair, one one one one. (*Looks at contents of a big envelope while holding the line.*) Is that Mr. Draper? It's me—er—Mab. I can't stop to talk now. I want you to come over at once. Come right up here. Will you? Thanks so much. (*She hangs up the receiver. Lady Mab has entered with clothes.*) I got his number after all, and he's coming now. You were entirely right. It will agitate me. But nature is so strong. (*Lady Mab's face falls.*) I say, what can this rigmarole here be? (*Handing over a foolscap document.*)

LADY MAB (*drops clothes—the pyjamas are not revealed*). Mr. Draper is coming—now!

BLANCHE (*firmly but kindly*). Pull yourself together, my girl. *You're* dressed, if I'm not. What is this?

LADY MAB (*pulling herself together and looking at the document*). Why. That's your speech for the ceremony to-morrow.

BLANCHE (*assuming full knowledge*). Of course it is.

LADY MAB. Sir Henry has run it very fine this time. In fact I was beginning to get alarmed——

BLANCHE. Oh! *I* wasn't.

LADY MAB. No! It's true he's never failed you yet. The thing's a bit long and windy. That's always Sir Henry's tendency, isn't it? But your ladyship can easily shorten it.

BLANCHE (*who has taken back the document*). What's this? 'In conclusion I may venture to express the hope'—why 'venture to express the hope'? Why not simply and boldly 'hope'? Nothing venturesome in expressing hope, is there? 'I may venture to express the hope that the institution whose beginnings we are witnessing to-day will serve to foster that good feeling between the different classes of the community with their different functions which is so necessary to the welfare of the Empire, but which our Bolsheviks and Syndicalists are doing their best to destroy.' What dreadful twaddle! Different functions be hanged! Unless he means that the function of one class is nobly to cook

the meal and wash up, and the function of the other gloriously to gorge itself. We aristocrats always begin to talk about good feeling when we see danger to our dividends. (*Strikes out the whole passage with a pencil.*) That's that, anyway. No. I'll make my own speech entirely. (*Rips up the document.*)

LADY MAB. Really, my lady!

BLANCHE. Yes, really. All out of my own head. I'll wake up this country, you see if I don't, old Kitty. . . . And what's this? Registered! (*Handling contents of another envelope.*) Oh, yes. Victory Loan. Bearer Bonds. Twenty-five thousand pounds. That's healthy.

LADY MAB. Your ladyship told me to get Bearer Bonds because they're easier to realize.

BLANCHE. I'll keep them by me, handy. Make you feel sort of safer among all this Bolshevism and Syndicalism, don't they?

LADY MAB (*apprehensive. Changing the subject.*) I see there's another letter from the Mayor of Bursley. I wonder if he's still trying to get your ladyship to sleep at his house to-night.

BLANCHE. No. It's a woman's writing. The

Mayoress, no doubt. Yes. 'Trust that after all you will see your way to honour us by accepting our hospitality for the night.'

LADY MAB (*smiling superiorly*). They are obstinate, these Midlanders, aren't they?

BLANCHE. Well, I'll honour her. After all I hate hotels.

LADY MAB. But he's an auctioneer.

BLANCHE. I love auctioneers. Help me on with my dress—quickly. (*She throws off the dressing-gown.*)

LADY MAB (*preparing to obey*). But we are bound to be very uncomfortable at the Mayor's.

BLANCHE (*ignoring Lady Mab's remark, and picking up the very violent pyjamas*). No wonder I had a bad night. I shall give these things a miss for the provinces.

LADY MAB (*very polite, but ignoring Blanche's remark*). And we've engaged rooms at the hotel at Stafford.

BLANCHE (*as her dress is being put on*). This skirt does not fit at all well. I shall make my

own wedding-dress. (*Looking at Lady Mab.*) Kitty, why did you put on that extraordinary secretarial dress to-day ?

LADY MAB (*continuing her own line of thought*). Yesterday your ladyship was quite decided against staying at the Mayor's.

BLANCHE. Kitty ! (*Looking at her again.*) Yesterday belongs to the dead past. And don't you forget it.

LADY MAB (*polite but pouting*). I don't see——

BLANCHE. You don't see that you're getting a bit above yourself, my girl.

Enter Aaron, rapidly.

AARON. Good morning.

BLANCHE. My Aaron ! How quick you've been ! (*She rushes into his arms and kisses him. Still holding him, and looking at Kitty, who is thunderstruck and resentful, but helpless. Firmly.*) Kitty, go and change that horrible dress immediately. Put something of mine on if you like. I want to talk to Mr. Draper.

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE I

The Mayoress of Bursley's drawing-room. *The room is on the first floor. The furniture gives evidence of some taste. Two doors. A large French window down stage L. A smaller window back, through which is obtained a glimpse of a highly industrial landscape.*

TIME : *Afternoon of same day as Act II,
Scene iii.*

Mrs. Clews is alone.

Enter Mr. Clews.

MRS. CLEWS. Five pounds, please.

MR. CLEWS (*teasingly*). Certainly. Fifty, if you like. Five hundred.

MRS. CLEWS (*as he offers to kiss her, spurning him*). Nay ! Five pounds and I'll thank you.

MR. CLEWS. What's it for ?

MRS. CLEWS. You'll know when you've paid me. And you'd better look sharp. Trouble's coming.

MR. CLEWS (*paying her*). I shall stop it out of your allowance if there's any hanky-panky.

MRS. CLEWS. You won't stop it out of my allowance. You've lost your bet.

MR. CLEWS. What bet ?

MRS. CLEWS. You bet me five pounds she wouldn't stay with us ; and she's coming. . . . With her secretary, if *you* please.

MR. CLEWS (*taken aback*). She isn't !

MRS. CLEWS (*showing him a telegram, which they both regard in silence*). She's late already. Of course. Those people always are. Never rely on them. Still, as you're late, it's a good thing she's late.

MR. CLEWS. I've disposed of over a hundred and forty Lots to-day.

MRS. CLEWS. I'm not denying it. But you're late, and she might have got here first, and then where'd you have been ?

MR. CLEWS (*heartily*). Well, I'm glad she's coming.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, I'm not.

MR. CLEWS. Why ?

MRS. CLEWS. I didn't want her to come. . . .
And her secretary.

MR. CLEWS. Then why did you make such a devil of a fuss about getting her here ? You were determined to have her.

MRS. CLEWS. Yes, and you bet me five pounds I shouldn't.

MR. CLEWS. And now you've got her and the money, too——

MRS. CLEWS (*handling Treasury Notes*). They're very dirty.

MR. CLEWS. No money is dirty. Now you've got her you don't want her. That's you all over. (*Laughs.*) Child ! Child—aged fifty.

MRS. CLEWS. I want her to *come*, but I don't *want* her to come.

MR. CLEWS. Clearness itself.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, of course it's clear! She's coming for a town function. You're the Mayor. And I suppose I'm the Mayoress. It was our business to ask her to stay with us, and it was her business to accept. Why should she refuse, I should like to know. A nice thing her saying she meant to stop at a hotel at Stafford to-night, and drive over here to-morrow for the day! Why Stafford? Well, anyway, she's coming. So that's all right. But I wish to goodness she wasn't.

MR. CLEWS (*soothingly*). Yes. I dare say she'll be a bit fastidious.

MRS. CLEWS. Fastidious? She's never seen a better bathroom than the spare bathroom. I don't care who she is. Nor better service. Nor better tea than she'll get here. Nor better cooking, if my experience of London hotels is worth anything. No, it's not her ladyship's fastidiousness that I'm afraid of. She's not my *sort*, and so you've got it, Ezra Clews.

MR. CLEWS (*laughing*). She's my sort.

MRS. CLEWS. Oh, is she? How do you

know ? (*Reflectively.*) First she won't, and then she will. Why couldn't she make up her mind and stick to it ? I've no patience with such work.

MR. CLEWS. Asking anybody to dinner ?

MRS. CLEWS. No. I'm not asking anybody to dinner. She couldn't expect it.

MR. CLEWS. Why not ?

MRS. CLEWS. Why not ? If I went up all of a sudden to stay with her, should *I* expect her to get her friends to meet me at six hours' notice ?

MR. CLEWS. Jack'd be glad to come to meet her, for one.

MRS. CLEWS. Which Jack ?

MR. CLEWS. Alderman.

MRS. CLEWS. That old bachelor ! And what about his sister, I should like to know.

MR. CLEWS. Needn't ask her.

MRS. CLEWS. Oh, needn't I ? You may be the Mayor, Ezra, but you aren't the Mayoress. I

should never hear the last of it if I didn't ask her too. No, if I didn't ask the entire Council there'd be so much jealousy let loose in this town that the place wouldn't hold me. We shall dine what they call 'quietly.'

MR. CLEWS. All right! All right! D'you know why you're so cross, my pet?

MRS. CLEWS. I'm not cross.

MR. CLEWS. Yes, you are, and it's simply because you're nervous.

MRS. CLEWS. Me nervous! You'll see whether I'm nervous. I've got an official duty to perform, and I shall perform it. But I shall keep my place and I'll see she keeps hers. (*She jumps up suddenly and listens.*) They're there.

MR. CLEWS (*teasingly*). Of course you aren't nervous. Any one can see that.

Mrs. Clews *puts her fingers to her nose at him, and slowly sits down.*

Enter Parlourmaid followed by Blanche Nixon and Lady Mab.

PARLOURMAID (*nervously*). Lady Mab Infold.
(*Exit.*)

MRS. CLEWS (*rising with dignity, to Blanche*).
How do you do, Lady Mab? I hope you've
had a good journey. It's very nice of you to come
all this way.

BLANCHE. Mrs. Clews, it's very nice of *you*
to ask me to stay here.

MRS. CLEWS. Oh! Not at all. It's all in
the day's work. My husband.

MR. CLEWS. Delighted to have you, Lady
Mab.

BLANCHE. How d'you do, Mr. Clews? This
is my secretary, Miss Crane. (*Indicating Lady
Mab, who languidly but politely shakes hands in
silence.*)

MRS. CLEWS. Now do sit down. I'm sure
you'd like some tea at once.

Enter Parlourmaid and another maid with tea.

MRS. CLEWS. Now, Betsy, let's have that tea.

PARLOURMAID. Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. CLEWS. Won't you sit down and make yourselves comfortable ?

LADY MAB. *I will. (Sits.)*

BLANCHE (*to Lady Mab*). You're rather exhausted, my poor dear. (*Lady Mab gives an assenting gesture.*)

MRS. CLEWS (*to Lady Mab*). A cup of tea is what *you* want. (*To Blanche.*) Which chair will you have, Lady Mab ?

BLANCHE. D'you mind if I stand a bit ? After sitting for over six hours——

MRS. CLEWS (*pouring out tea*). You feel as if you want to stretch yourself ? I know. Well, there's plenty of room to walk about.

Exit second maid.

PARLOURMAID (*aside to Mr. Clews, confidentially*). There's a parcel for you, sir.

MR. CLEWS. Bring it in.

PARLOURMAID. Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

MR. CLEWS (*to Blanche*). Do you mean to say you've got down in six hours ?

BLANCHE. And a quarter.

MR. CLEWS. You must have stepped out a bit. What car ? Rolls-Royce, I reckon.

BLANCHE. I never looked. Hired it. Hire everything. Saves so much responsibility.

MR. CLEWS. Eh ! But I like my own car.

MRS. CLEWS. Not when you've run into a wall you don't, Ezra. (*To Blanche.*) I hope the gardener's looking after your chauffeur.

BLANCHE. Oh, yes, thanks. He was waiting for us at the gates. (*At the window.*) What a splendid view you have here.

MRS. CLEWS. Should you call it 'splendid' ?

BLANCHE. I think it's a splendid panorama. And that town hall in the middle with the gold angel on the top. (*Roguishly to Mr. Clews.*) I suppose you live up here so that you can keep a fatherly eye on the whole town ?

MR. CLEWS (*laughing*). That's a good joke, Mary.

MRS. CLEWS (*rather sternly to Mr. Clews.*) Will you please pass the cups, Ezra. (*He obeys*). Take the sugar, too. Give Miss Crane hers first, as she's so tired.

BLANCHE (*still looking out of the window*). I like your town park. It's very big. But, of course, the town's very big, isn't it ?

MR. CLEWS. Forty thousand odd.

BLANCHE. Really. And I suppose they've made pottery here for thousands of years ?

MR. CLEWS. Well, fifteen hundred. (*Enter Parlourmaid with parcel.*) Undo it.

MRS. CLEWS. It's not so much pottery I object to. It's coal I object to.

BLANCHE. You mean the smuts ? (*Taking cup.*) Thanks.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, I do.

BLANCHE. Well, Mrs. Clews, that's just what I was going to ask you. With all these big

chimneys all round, Bursley must be even smokier than London, and goodness knows London's smoky enough—how *do* you manage to keep your white curtains so clean ?

Exit Parlourmaid.

MRS. CLEWS (*touched, unbending*). I change them.

MR. CLEWS (*opening the parcel*). She had 'em changed this morning—for you.

MRS. CLEWS. I had them changed this morning because it's the day for changing, not because of Lady Mab. (*Stiffly again.*) As a matter of fact, I didn't know this morning that I should have the pleasure of Lady Mab's company to-day.

BLANCHE. Well, Mrs. Clews, I'm awfully glad I decided to inflict myself on you—you and your husband make me feel so at home. I'd always heard that Five Towns people are exceedingly hospitable, but——

MRS. CLEWS (*rigidly*). We never make a fuss over folks. We expect them to take us as they find us.

BLANCHE. That's what I *like*. Are those what you call pikelets ?

MR. CLEWS. Fancy you knowing *that* name !

BLANCHE. May I help myself ?

MR. CLEWS. Your hands 'll be all butter.

BLANCHE (*tasting, joyously*). Um—um—um !

MRS. CLEWS. Take this napkin, Lady Mab. I dare say in London they don't have napkins with afternoon tea, but we always do here.

BLANCHE. Thank you. Oh ! What a beautiful teacloth ! Oh, Mrs. Clews ! What a beautiful teacloth ! (*Examining teacloth.*)

MRS. CLEWS. Do you really think so ?

BLANCHE. It's lovely. (*Turning over the corner of the cloth.*)

MRS. CLEWS (*slightly disturbed*). You may well turn it over. Of course, the maids always put them wrong-side-up—always.

BLANCHE (*reflectively, still examining*). Yes, nearly always, don't they ? But with such very

finely finished work it's easy to make the mistake, isn't it ?

MRS. CLEWS. May be it is, maybe it isn't. *I* should never mistake one side for the other. But girls don't look.

BLANCHE. Of course, you can't buy things like that in London shops.

MRS. CLEWS (*dryly*). No, I suppose not.

BLANCHE (*playfully accusing*). I believe you crocheted that yourself.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, I did it last year. I've no time for such fal-lals nowadays—the mayoralty, I mean.

BLANCHE. But where *do* you get these beautiful old English patterns from ?

MRS. CLEWS. Oh ! Out of a crochet book that used to belong to my grandmother.

BLANCHE. Well, I think it's simply marvelous.

MR. CLEWS (*looking up from his parcel*). You've made a friend of the old lady for life, that's what you've done.

MRS. CLEWS (*turning on him sharply*). And what are you about, Ezra? Do you call this entertaining ladies?

BLANCHE (*glancing at contents of the parcel*). Etchings, Mr. Clews?

MRS. CLEWS. My husband's got himself into the hands of those dealers in London. They send him down samples to look at, and once he's seen 'em he's done for. Calls himself a collector—(*benevolently*) don't you, Ezra?

MR. CLEWS. I've got a few (*glancing at walls*), as ye see. Do you like D. Y. Cameron? Here's one.

BLANCHE (*looking at the etching*). Mountains. D'you know, I think I know more about tea-cloths than etchings.

MRS. CLEWS. That's right, Lady Mab. That's right.

MR. CLEWS. I told you you'd made a friend of her for life.

MRS. CLEWS. His father used to keep pigeons. He keeps etchings.

MR. CLEWS. I think I shall stick to this one (*indicating the etching by D. Y. Cameron*).

MRS. CLEWS. How much is it ?

MR. CLEWS. Eighteen guineas.

MRS. CLEWS (*looking at it*). It's marked twenty-one.

MR. CLEWS (*with an air of innocence*). So it is. Think it's worth it, Lady Mab ?

BLANCHE. Kitty here understands etchings better than I do.

LADY MAB (*looking at the etching negligently*). Very nice. Mrs. Clews, would you be very shocked if I had a cigarette ? I'm afraid my nerves——

MRS. CLEWS (*benevolently reproachful*). Ezra, what are you thinking of ?

MR. CLEWS. Sorry ! Sorry ! (*Hands cigarettes from his case to Lady Mab and Blanche.*)

MRS. CLEWS. And what about me, I should like to know ? (*To the astonishment of Lady Mab she takes a cigarette. As Mr. Clews strikes a match.*) No etching is worth twenty-one guineas. That's what I say. You could buy quite a good muff for that. But have I quite a good muff ? (*She blows out the match which Mr. Clews offers to her.*) Not three.

MR. CLEWS. Are *you* superstitious, Lady Mab ?

BLANCHE. Not a bit. But I don't believe in lighting three cigarettes with one match.

MRS. CLEWS. Of course not. It stands to reason.

All four smoke.

MR. CLEWS. And what d'ye think of Muirhead Bone, Miss Crane ? (*Showing another etching.*)

LADY MAB (*vaguely*). Muirhead Bone ?

BLANCHE. Kitty, my child, I feel sure Mrs. Clews will excuse you if you go and lie down. You don't look at all well. Will you excuse her, Mrs. Clews ?

MRS. CLEWS. That I will. I'll take you to your bedroom myself, Miss Crane.

LADY MAB. Thanks so much.

MRS. CLEWS (*to Blanche*). Would you care to see your room, too ?

MR. CLEWS (*interposing*). Nay, nay ! I've something to say to Lady Mab, and I'll say it now. It's about to-morrow's affair.

BLANCHE. Certainly, Mr. Clews. (*To Lady Mab.*) Don't *think* of unpacking, child. I'll see to that when I come up.

MRS. CLEWS (*dryly*). She needn't. Your things will be unpacked by this time.

Exeunt Lady Mab and Mrs. Clews.

MR. CLEWS. Now, Lady Mab.

BLANCHE. Now, Mr. Mayor.

MR. CLEWS. Why do you say ' Mr. Mayor ' ?

BLANCHE. Because I feel sure you're going to be—er—municipal.

MR. CLEWS (*laughs*). Look here, young lady ! Before I proceed further, you and I had better come to an understanding.

BLANCHE. Yes, let's have it out—whatever it is.

MR. CLEWS. You're the celebrated Lady Mab Infold. You're one of the big bugs of what they call London society. Your father was a Marquis. My father was an auctioneer.

BLANCHE. Yes, but all that isn't my fault ; and it isn't yours, either. We're both quite innocent.

MR. CLEWS. As I was saying, my father was an auctioneer. And I'm an auctioneer.

BLANCHE. Believe me, marquises aren't half as important as auctioneers. Why, without auctioneers England couldn't always be changing hands, could it ?

MR. CLEWS. You're at it again.

BLANCHE. But what I've always liked about auctioneers is that they're so—persuasive.

MR. CLEWS. Well then, we'll put it at that. And you must let me persuade you that somehow I can't treat you as if you were the celebrated Lady Mab Infold and me only an auctioneer. I can't do it.

BLANCHE. And why not ?

MR. CLEWS. You know why not. You won't let me. You're not at all the sort of young woman I was expecting.

BLANCHE. Oh ! What sort of young woman were you expecting ?

MR. CLEWS. Well, something a long sight more stuck-up and finicking and flim-flammy than you are.

BLANCHE. I see.

MR. CLEWS. Yes.

BLANCHE. Well, now I'll tell you something. I don't want you to treat me as if I was the celebrated Lady Mab Infold. And what's more, I should be extremely annoyed if you did.

MR. CLEWS. How do you want me to treat you ?

BLANCHE. Why! As you are treating me, of course. I'm one human being. You're another. That makes two.

MR. CLEWS. Right!

BLANCHE. So we've had it out and it's all very friendly, and we're as thick as thieves. Now the business.

MR. CLEWS. This foundation-stone laying.

BLANCHE. What about it?

MR. CLEWS. Wants some arranging, you know. I always like everything to go off slick, and I always make a time-table—and stick to it. I suppose you'll just declare the stone 'well and truly laid,' like ladies usually do when they lay foundation-stones, and that'll be all.

BLANCHE. Of course, it won't be all.

MR. CLEWS (*surprised*). You're thinking to make a regular speech, then, are you? . . . I'm only asking because I've got to arrange my own speech. You see, I have to boss the proceedings.

BLANCHE. Mr. Clews, why did you ask me to come here?

MR. CLEWS. Well, I saw in the paper as you'd been doing something similar in the East End of London ; and the idea occurred to me——

BLANCHE. Yes, it was an auctioneer's idea. You thought everybody would be on pins to have a look at me. You thought what a good advertisement I should be for your Health Institute, and how my name would get your Health Institute into all the London papers ! Now didn't you ?

MR. CLEWS. Hang it ! Yes, I did !

BLANCHE. Anyway, you're honest. But really you've been very naughty, my dear Mr. Mayor. Very naughty indeed ! You meant to use me like a mere doll. Now I just want to ask you confidentially—is this Health Institute a serious undertaking or is it a circus ?

MR. CLEWS. It's the most important thing there's ever been in this town, and it'll be the first Municipal Health Institute in the whole country.

BLANCHE. And you're bursting with pride over it.

MR. CLEWS. I am.

BLANCHE. Then why not treat it seriously, and let me treat it seriously? . . . No descriptions of my clothes in the papers. No photographs. No——

MR. CLEWS. No photographs! But our two leading photographers have been engaged by the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Sketch* to take——

BLANCHE (*excited*). What?

MR. CLEWS. Yes. Not to mention the *Staffordshire Sentinel*.

BLANCHE. They must all be stopped. If they aren't all stopped, if you don't give me your word instantly to have them stopped, I'll go back to London at once—this very night. I hate being photographed.

MR. CLEWS. All right! All right! But we've always understood down here that you were the most photographed lady off the stage.

BLANCHE (*persisting*). You give me your solemn word? (*Snatching up her dust-cloak.*)

MR. CLEWS. Why ! Bless us ! Yes.

BLANCHE (*dropping the cloak*). I'm a serious woman.

MR. CLEWS. So I see.

BLANCHE (*alluringly*). You'll see even clearer to-morrow.

MR. CLEWS. Then your ladyship intends to show us Bursleyites how to run our Health Institute ?

BLANCHE. Not at all. But I intend to take the opportunity you've so kindly given me of spreading some of my ideas.

MR. CLEWS. No doubt you're a practised speaker.

BLANCHE. I never do anything else but talk. It's my speciality.

MR. CLEWS. And I dare say you've been looking the subject up ? Well, it's very conscientious of you, and if my apologies are any use to you, they're yours.

BLANCHE (*smiling*). I've certainly not been looking the subject up. I've had my ideas about municipal health for years. And I'm bursting with them just as you're bursting with pride. Like to hear some of them ?

MR. CLEWS. I would that !

BLANCHE. They're dangerous.

MR. CLEWS. I bet they are.

BLANCHE. Well, in the first place, I'm not going very strong on the anti-alcohol tack. Drink isn't a cause of misery ; it's a result. It's a result of you folks who manage towns not knowing your business. Nine toppers out of ten take to whisky because you haven't understood that people need decent bedrooms and recreation a great deal more than they need drainage and trams.

MR. CLEWS. That's a bull's-eye.

BLANCHE. Secondly. If you looked after the mothers properly the mothers would look after the children, and there wouldn't be any infancy health problems. In this district you've got nearly the highest infant mortality in the kingdom.

MR. CLEWS. Yes, but if you tell us so, only our respect for womanhood and the aristocracy will save you from being jolly well lynched on the platform.

BLANCHE. I'll 'jolly well' risk it. . . . You're keeping calm ?

MR. CLEWS. I'm trying to.

BLANCHE. Then, thirdly : In the work of a Health Institute you can't separate morals from medicine.

MR. CLEWS. We have done up to now. Doctors always do.

BLANCHE. Show me one of your doctors and I'll ask him this : 'Listen to me, doctor,' I'll say. 'You know what your consumption death-rate is.' 'Yes,' he'll say. 'Well,' I'll say, 'having regard to your consumption death-rate, how do you defend a system of morals that puts up a twenty-thousand-pound church in a slum where no man not an idiot would house a pig ?' (Mr. Clews *rings the bell.*) . . . And I'll pause for a reply, and I'll see whether your doctors still refuse to separate morals from medicine.

Enter Parlourmaid.

MR. CLEWS (*sitting down, to Parlourmaid*).
Bring me a liqueur brandy—and quick.

PARLOURMAID. Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

BLANCHE. You perceive how alcoholism is a result and not a cause.

MR. CLEWS (*weakly*). Anything more ?

BLANCHE. One point, as you've mentioned doctors. I shall suggest a motto for your Health Institute : ' First knock sense into doctors.'

MR. CLEWS. Well, that's put the lid on. There's going to be three doctors on the Board of Management. I see I shall have to order a special police guard for you after the ceremony.

BLANCHE (*shaking her head*). Don't be alarmed. The crowd is much more likely to insist on dragging your car and me in it with ropes up to your house. I've got something up my sleeve—an infallible recipe for popularity on a day like to-morrow.

MR. CLEWS. What is it ? I should like a bit of it for myself.

BLANCHE. Ah ! You'll know to-morrow.

Enter Parlourmaid.

PARLOURMAID. A gentleman to see Lady Mab
Infold. (*She hands a card.*)

BLANCHE (*after looking at the card, controlling herself*). Oh ! Will you excuse me for a moment ? I'll just go out and see him.

MR. CLEWS. Take Lady Mab and the gentleman into the breakfast-room.

PARLOURMAID. Yes, sir.

Exeunt Blanche and Parlourmaid.

Enter Mrs. Clews.

MRS. CLEWS. You look startled. What on earth have you been doing to your hair ?

MR. CLEWS. She's a whirlwind, that wench is.

MRS. CLEWS. She's a great girl. I almost wish I'd asked some of the folks to dinner.

MR. CLEWS. She's a great girl. But she's going to make a speech to-morrow that'll turn this town head over heels.

MRS. CLEWS. Do the town good. We want more women to make speeches. Where is she? What's that chattering downstairs in the hall?

MR. CLEWS. Some fellow's just called to see her. (*Picking up card.*) 'Mr. Aaron Draper.'

MRS. CLEWS. Why! That's the one she's engaged to. (*She moves quickly towards the door.*)

MR. CLEWS. Where are you going?

MRS. CLEWS. I'm going to fetch him up here and have a look at him.

MR. CLEWS. But——

Exit Mrs. Clews.

During the foregoing dialogue conversation has been indistinctly heard off. 'I'm afraid this is rather a surprise for you.' 'Shall I take your things, sir?' 'We haven't been here very long ourselves. Only just had tea.' 'I came by the twelve-thirty express.' 'Will you and the gentleman come this way, my lady?' Etc.

MRS. CLEWS (*off*). Don't go in there, Lady Mab. Come in the drawing-room a moment.

BLANCHE (*off*). Oh! May I introduce Mr. Aaron Draper? Aaron, Mrs. Clews, our Mayoress.

MRS. CLEWS (*off*). Very pleased, I'm sure.

Enter Blanche, Mrs. Clews, and Aaron.

BLANCHE (*fondly*). Mr. Clews, this is my young man (*patting* Aaron)—Aaron Draper. Aaron—Mr. Clews, our Mayor.

MR. CLEWS. Glad to see you, Mr. Draper. (*They shake hands.*) This is an unexpected pleasure.

MRS. CLEWS. But a pleasure it is. Now do sit down and make yourself at home.

AARON. It's an intrusion, Mrs. Clews, that's what it is. But some very important business turned up, and I thought it advisable to run down and see—er—Lady Mab immediately.

MRS. CLEWS (*positively*). We'll leave you. Come along, Ezra.

AARON. But, please——

MR. CLEWS. Nay, nay! Get your *business* over first. I hope you'll stay for dinner.

AARON. You are very kind, but I'm afraid I can't.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, we'll argue that out afterwards. (*Beckons to Mr. Clews.*)

As Mr. and Mrs. Clews reach the door, enter Parlourmaid with a liqueur brandy on a tray. Mr. Clews snatches it up and drinks it. Mrs. Clews gives an appropriate gesture of astonishment, then takes the glass and sniffs at it.

Exeunt Mr. and Mrs. Clews and Parlourmaid.

As soon as she is alone with Aaron Blanche's demeanour towards him changes to one of seriousness and reserve.

BLANCHE. I think—er—Kitty's gone to lie down. Not feeling very well.

AARON. Oh! . . . I came down at once because I met your—er—uncle in Piccadilly this morning soon after you'd gone——

BLANCHE. My uncle——

AARON. The Marquis.

BLANCHE. Oh ! Him ! Yes ?

AARON. I happened to mention about this stone-laying in Bursley. He didn't know anything about it.

BLANCHE. No ?

AARON. As soon as your uncle heard that there was a Municipal Health Institute in the wind, he made up his mind to come down by the first train to-morrow and see the show for himself. The old gentleman seems to be interested in such things. He's certainly very interested in you.

BLANCHE (*still cautiously*). Come down here ?

AARON. Yes.

BLANCHE (*bluffing*). Well, what about it ?
(*With a forced laugh.*) It's a free country.

AARON. Oh, certainly ! But I thought you and—er—Kitty ought to be warned.

BLANCHE. Warned ?

AARON. Yes.

BLANCHE. Why 'warned' ? Has—my uncle got rabies ?

AARON. Well, of course that's for you to decide.

BLANCHE (*in a new tone*). Let me ask you one question ?

AARON. Well ?

BLANCHE (*with significance*). As a general rule, when you've started out to do a thing do you believe in seeing it through ?

AARON. Yes, I do.

BLANCHE. You aren't in the habit of giving in ?

AARON. No.

BLANCHE. You don't throw the sponge (*with a gesture*) up to the ceiling ?

AARON. No.

BLANCHE (*approaching him*). Whatever happens ?

AARON. No.

BLANCHE. Shake hands on it, then. (*They shake hands.*) Something must be done.

Lady Mab *opens the door*. Blanche is still holding Aaron's hand. *As soon as she perceives Lady Mab her demeanour to Aaron becomes very affectionate, and she deliberately kisses him twice.*

BLANCHE. Darling !

Lady Mab *advances impetuously into the room, and Blanche affects to perceive her for the first time.*

LADY MAB (*highly resentful*). What ! Again !

BLANCHE (*calmly and kindly*). My poor girl, I thought you were lying down. Are you better, or are you worse ?

LADY MAB (*to Aaron*). The parlourmaid was bringing me up some eau-de-Cologne and she happened to tell me you were here.

BLANCHE (*soothingly*). Ah! You are worse.

LADY MAB (*to Aaron*). What have you come for?

AARON. I——

BLANCHE (*stopping him with an easy gesture. To LADY MAB.*) You're not in a fit state to be bothered, my dear. Besides, there is no reason why you should be. Mr. Draper has come to see me, not my faithful secretary.

LADY MAB. I shall be obliged if you will let me see Mr. Draper alone.

BLANCHE. No, my poor child. You obviously aren't yourself. You might do something you'd regret afterwards. You might, for instance, scratch my Aaron's beautiful face.

LADY MAB (*with an outburst*). Good God! Don't you think this play-acting has gone far enough?

BLANCHE. Kitty, please don't be blasphemous. 'Play-acting'? What do you mean?

LADY MAB. You know perfectly well you aren't me.

BLANCHE (*soothingly*). Did I ever say I was ?
(*To Aaron, who was about to speak.*) No, no !
Gently. She must be reasoned with gently. (*To*
Lady Mab.) Of course I'm not you, dear.

LADY MAB. I mean you're not Lady Mab
Infold. You're only Blanche Nixon.

BLANCHE (*blandly*). Blanche Nixon ? Blanche
Nixon ? Where have I heard that name ? Oh,
yes. The typewriter woman. My poor child,
you aren't merely worse, you're very much worse.
You never spoke a word all the way down. Some
people might have thought you were sulking.
But I felt sure you were only unwell. I'd no idea
you were *so* unwell.

LADY MAB. It's a plot against me.

BLANCHE. What's a plot against you ?

LADY MAB. His being here like this.

BLANCHE (*to Aaron*). Of course, they always
imagine plots when they get themselves into this
state. (*To Lady Mab coaxingly.*) Kitty, please
do keep steady. Don't let your mind go entirely.
I'll tell you why Mr. Draper is here. He heard
that the Marquis thought of coming down to-

morrow morning to see the show—a pleasant surprise for me! And so Aaron very kindly made a special journey to let me know. That's the simple truth. You see that if there's any plot it's not mine—it's the Marquis's.

LADY MAB. Uncle coming here! Oh, I'm so glad.

BLANCHE (*to Aaron*). 'Uncle'! (*To Lady Mab*.) The Marquis will not come here, Kitty. I shall stop him from coming. Just take down this telegram, will you? A little secretarial work may do you good.

LADY MAB. Take down a telegram? Indeed I shall not take down any telegram.

BLANCHE (*kindly but firmly*). Kitty, did you or did you not come here as my secretary? Answer me now.

LADY MAB (*after hesitating*). Yes.

BLANCHE. Then you will be good enough to take down this telegram. (*Handing pencil*.) Here's a pencil. Aaron, get some paper. (*Looking round*.) Your card there will do. Give it to me. It's quite short, the message is. (Aaron

hands the card to Blanche, who forces it on Lady Mab.) Get the address right first. Then go on : ‘My sweetest uncle. I absolutely forbid you to come here to-morrow. If you do I will make a scandal.—Mab.’ *(Lady Mab writes.)* Got it ? Right. *(Takes the card.)* As if I’d have that interfering old fool of a Marquis worrying me here to-morrow . . .

LADY MAB *(outraged)*. ‘Interfering old fool’ !

BLANCHE. Aaron darling, run off with that to the post office at once, will you ? And be sure to copy it out correctly on to the form.

AARON. Yes, yes.

LADY MAB *(appealingly)*. Aaron !

BLANCHE *(sincerely reproachful)*. Kitty, Kitty ! You mustn’t call people by their Christian names like that. One would think you were engaged to him yourself. Don’t wait, Aaron. I say, Aaron. Better not come back. *(She waves him a kiss.)*

AARON *(positively ; with evident relief at being able to get away)*. I shall not. *(Exit.)*

LADY MAB (*in a new decided tone*). I'm going—this instant.

BLANCHE. Where to ?

LADY MAB. Back to town.

BLANCHE (*kindly*). I won't permit it.

LADY MAB. You can't stop it.

BLANCHE. You haven't got any money.

LADY MAB. Yes, I have.

BLANCHE. My poor forgetful child ! Don't you remember I borrowed every shilling you had on you before we started ?

Lady Mab gives a great hysterical squeal of anger and despair, and drops on to an armchair.

BLANCHE. That's better. That will ease you. Try to cry, my dear.

Enter Mrs. Clews.

MRS. CLEWS. Whatever's amiss ? Whatever's amiss ?

BLANCHE (*stroking* Lady Mab). It will be quite all right in a minute, Mrs. Clews. Poor Kitty came down because she thought I might want her. And she oughtn't to have come. The strain was too much for her. She has these fits sometimes. A form of hysteria. (*In a lower voice.*) She has delusions. It'll soon pass. We must get her to bed.

MRS. CLEWS (*gently*). There, there, Miss Crane! (*Aside to Blanche.*) I should suggest some castor-oil.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

TIME : *Late the next afternoon.*

Enter Blanche and Mrs. Clews, followed by the Parlourmaid.

Blanche and Mrs. Clews drop into chairs in attitudes of exhaustion.

MRS. CLEWS. What a day of it ! . . . Well, Betsy, has cook come back ?

PARLOURMAID. Oh, yes, 'm. She hurried up th' hill till she's all throbbing.

MRS. CLEWS. Here, take this. (*Gives Parlourmaid a garment.*) Did cook like it ?

PARLOURMAID. She dared na stay till th' end, m'm ; but she stayed till th' end o' Lady Mab's speech, and she says it was beautiful, especially the last bit.

MRS. CLEWS. The last bit ?

BLANCHE. The bit where I tried to do the Midland accent, I expect. (*To Parlourmaid.*)

You must tell cook I take it as a great compliment—from *her*, Betsy.

PARLOURMAID. Oh, I will, me lady.

MRS. CLEWS. ‘*Tried* to do the Midland accent.’ You did it better than I could have done it myself. It was the most delicious surprise for all of us. (*To Parlourmaid.*) I hope you’ve been looking after Miss Crane.

PARLOURMAID. Oh, yes, ’m. Her was for getting up.

MRS. CLEWS. Getting up, was she? *Did* she get up?

PARLOURMAID. Her started to get up, ’m. But I went out o’ the room and locked th’ bedroom door on th’ outside.

MRS. CLEWS. Locked the door! Whatever were you thinking of, my girl?

PARLOURMAID. Ye told me I wasn’t on no account to let Miss Crane get up. I couldn’t stop her from getting up, but says I to myself, ‘I can’t stop ye from getting up, but I can stop ye from coming out, miss,’ and I did. What

was the last words ye said to me, m'm ? 'I leave ye in charge, Betsy,' ye said.

BLANCHE (*alarmed but amused*). I'd better go upstairs and see Kitty.

PARLOURMAID. Ye better hadn't, my lady. Her's asleep again now. I unlocked th' door and looked in.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, you're a nice sort of girl, I must say, Betsy ! Did Miss Crane say anything ?

PARLOURMAID. Well, she did say a few things, m'm. But I didna' catch much, what with it being through th' door and her talking so funny.

MRS. CLEWS. Talking so funny ?

PARLOURMAID. The *way* her talks, m'm (*imitating London accent*). Ow, now !

BLANCHE. Like me, you mean ?

PARLOURMAID. Oh ! Worse than you, my lady.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, that will do for the moment, Betsy. We've had tea at the Town Hall.

PARLOURMAID. Thank ye, m'm.

MRS. CLEWS. Take Lady Mab's things.

PARLOURMAID. Yes, 'm. (Exit.)

MRS. CLEWS. I really must apologize to you for that maid locking Miss Crane in. I never heard of such a thing! But the worst of Betsy is she always *will* do a bit more than she's told.

BLANCHE. You know as well as I do it's side-splittingly funny.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, it is. But what will Miss Crane think?

BLANCHE. Oh! Don't trouble about Kitty. I'll attend to Kitty.

MRS. CLEWS. I do wish she'd been able to be at the lunch and the ceremony and the tea. She'd have enjoyed your success ever so much.

BLANCHE (*enigmatically*). Wouldn't she!

MRS. CLEWS. Eh, but I'm pleased it wasn't a bazaar. I can't bear bazaars. They're the stupidest way of raising money I ever struck in my born days.

BLANCHE. How I agree with you ! A bazaar is always the grave of a reputation.

MRS. CLEWS. You've made *your* reputation down here, anyhow, for ever and ever.

BLANCHE. Have I ?

MRS. CLEWS (*laughing to herself*). Oh ! Some of the faces when you were hitting them under the ribs in your speech. But they all had to laugh. You simply carried them off their feet—everybody !

The sound of an approaching band is heard in the distance, at first very faintly.

BLANCHE. Well, they carried me off *my* feet. I'm so glad of a bit of quiet after it all. (*Sighs.*)

MRS. CLEWS. I'm gladder, I can tell you that ! We might have had half the Town Council in the house by this time if you hadn't been so clever. 'She's a wise 'un,' I said to myself when you whispered to me to have the car sent round to the side-door of the Town Hall.

BLANCHE. I'm not so wise as all that, Mrs. Clews. I'm quite, quite mad, if you really knew.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, we could do with a bit more madness of your sort. (*With a movement.*) You'll excuse me if I speak frankly. Until I met you I always thought you *were* quite mad.

BLANCHE. Oh ! Why ?

MRS. CLEWS. Well, from what I read in the papers. I dreaded your coming here. But I was determined to have you. I'm very determined, I am.

BLANCHE. And d'you know, I dreaded coming here.

MRS. CLEWS (*slightly taken aback*). You did ? I hope you've been comfortable.

BLANCHE. Oh, Mrs. Clews, I've loved it. But perhaps it hasn't occurred to you that all houses of provincial mayors aren't like yours. In some houses you don't have your boots cleaned, you have them licked—all the time. I hate that. And then you're shown off from morning to night like a prize cow. I hate that, too. But here I've never had my boots licked here, and you've not shown me off once.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, it never struck me in that light, but I see what you mean.

BLANCHE. You talk about the papers. But can I help the papers? Do you know that there's no law to prevent a newspaper photographer taking a snapshot of you whenever he feels inclined?

MRS. CLEWS. I should like to catch 'em trying to take a snapshot of *me*! I'd snapshot 'em.

BLANCHE. You see, I move in a world of marquises and millionaires. Always did. And it's a very queer world.

MRS. CLEWS (*emphatically*). It must be. It seems to me as if you'd always got to be at some 'do.'

BLANCHE. Quite true. Now your husband's an auctioneer, and he collects pictures and things, so you'll understand—(*breaking off*). What's that music?

MRS. CLEWS. I expect it's the band that played at the stone-laying—the Bursley Town Silver Prize Band. What were you saying about auctions?

BLANCHE. Will you believe me that in my world it's the correct thing to go to all the big auction-sales at Christie's. One simply has to go.

MRS. CLEWS. But why ?

BLANCHE. Well, to be in the swim. One can't avoid it. You hate bazaars, but you go to them, don't you ?

MRS. CLEWS. Ah ! But you see, I'm the *Mayoress*.

BLANCHE. Yes. I was forgetting that. Still, I assure you we all have social obligations.

MRS. CLEWS. How odd ! Then there's another thing. You people seem always to be at the big divorce cases and things.

BLANCHE. Because our friends are always *in* them.

MRS. CLEWS. But you aren't *married*, Lady Mab !

BLANCHE. Oh ! That makes no difference—in my world. Besides, I'm engaged. And then I know all the judges. And supposing a judge asks me at dinner whether I'd like a ticket for a certain case. I couldn't offend him by refusing.

MRS. CLEWS. Why not ?

BLANCHE. Doesn't do to offend a judge. You never know what may turn up.

MRS. CLEWS (*rather shocked*). Nay, nay !

BLANCHE. I'm only telling you to show you how difficult the position of a girl like me is.

MRS. CLEWS. Well, I suppose every one has their own troubles. But I'll say this—you're too good for your world.

Enter Mr. Clews.

The sound of the band is now quite loud.

MR. CLEWS. Well, folks !

MRS. CLEWS. Ezra, what's that band coming up this way for ? Is it going to the station ?

MR. CLEWS. It's going to no station, missis. It's coming into your garden. And there's about a couple of thousand people following it.

MRS. CLEWS. What for ?

MR. CLEWS. Well, why do people follow a band ? This one's set on serenading Lady Mab.

(*To Lady Mab.*) You ran off, and the band's coming after you, that's all.

BLANCHE. Oh dear !

MRS. CLEWS. It's a pity we can't have a bit of peace. You ought to have stopped it. You can see Lady Mab doesn't like it.

MR. CLEWS. It's your own fault, Lady Mab. You shouldn't have made yourself so popular. But, my word ! You've given my Health Institute a leg up in the world ; and I thank ye with all my heart. Your recipe for popularity worked like a charm. It was infallible, right enough.

BLANCHE. My recipe for popularity ?

MR. CLEWS. Yes. Yesterday afternoon you told me you'd got an infallible recipe for popularity, and by gum you had. I never saw such an effect as you made when you began to talk to 'em in their own dialect.

BLANCHE. But *that* wasn't my recipe for popularity.

MR. CLEWS. Wasn't it ?

BLANCHE. I haven't used my infallible recipe for popularity yet. Haven't wanted it.

MR. CLEWS. Well, you won't want it now.

BLANCHE. Oh ! I may use it yet.

The band, having grown very loud, comes to the end of its tune, and the murmur of people is heard.

MRS. CLEWS (*who had put her fingers to her ears*). Thank goodness !

MR. CLEWS (*going to the window*). Yes, but look here. Something's got to be done about this. The people 'll soon be all over your flower-beds, missis, and there's about a million of 'em in the park beyond.

MRS. CLEWS. Eh, Lady Mab. You've a lot to answer for.

Blanche goes to the window and looks out, by the side of Mr. Clews. Cheering is immediately heard, and cries of 'Lady Mab,' 'That's her,' 'Speech.' Blanche shakes her head.

MR. CLEWS. Nay. You'll have to say something, Lady Mab, or they'll pull the house down. They're very hearty in this district.

VOICES. Speech ! Give us a bit o' th' right sort.

BLANCHE (*to the crowd below*). My kind friends, I'm very much obliged to you all, but I said all I had to say this afternoon. If I said it again you might lynch me, and I'm not quite ready for lynching.

Laughter below.

VOICE. Give us a bit o' Staffordshire, wench. Summat as us can understand.

VOICE. Good owd Mab !

BLANCHE (*imitating the local accent*). So it's good owd Mab, is it ? Eh, there's been a lot o' flattery this day. There's been a lot o' buttering up. I'm none so fond o' buttering up, mysen. I tow'd all your nob's a thing or two this afternoon. And I'll tell you a thing or two now, and don't say ye havena' asked for it. I went over one o' yer pot-works this morning at nine o'clock, and it was very white. Then I went down one o' yer coal-pits at eleven o'clock, and it was very black. (*Laughter.*) I was afeard I should never come up again, and when I come up I was that like a nigger as my husband as is

to be wouldna' ha' known me. (*Laughter.*) Then I put on my best Sunday togs and I were off to th' stone-laying. So ye may say as I've seen your town. Eh, but you're a grand folk. And it's a grand town. But it's rare and dirty; that it is. They dunna give soap and scrubbing-brushes away in this town. (*Laughter.*) I've heard a lot o' grumbling about the Town Council. I'll be bound it's as good a council as there is in England, but if ye want a better ye'll have yer chance at th' next election. Who makes th' Town Council if it isna' yeselves? Put some women on it. (*Cheers.*) Put th' Mayoress on it. She's got more sense than ten men. (*Cheers.*)

VOICE. Down with aristocrats!

BLANCHE. What's that?

VOICE. Down with aristocrats!

BLANCHE (*London accent*). Well, supposing my father *was* a marquis? What about it? I didn't choose my father, you know; but I'm proud of him. (*Cheers.*)

VOICES. Down with profiteers! Share and share alike!

Lady Mab *enters unobserved in a dressing-gown.*

BLANCHE (*pointing below*). It's you there, is it, who are talking about share and share alike. You with a grey cap like the tail-end of a dish-cloth. (*Laughter.*) Have you got anything of your own? Did you buy any Victory Bonds, by any chance?

VOICES. Go it, Mab! He's got fifty pounds' worth o' Victory. Bought it at the post office on th' last day.

BLANCHE. Got fifty pounds' worth, has he? Well, let him act on his own principles and share it out. Now then, out with it, my friend.

VOICES. Good owd Mab!

BLANCHE. He isn't unbuttoning his pockets, I see. Well, I'll set him the example. I've got more than fifty pounds' worth of Victory Bonds. I've got twenty-five thousand pounds' worth. And here they are. (*She produces the scrip. Then in local accent.*) I keep 'em in me bodice for safety. (*London accent.*) I brought them down with me on purpose. They're bearer bonds and they're as good as money. And I'm going to give them to your Health

Institute because I believe in health institutes, and I believe in you. Mr. Mayor, please take them, with my best wishes. (*She hands the scrip to Mr. Clews. Aside to Mr. Clews.*) That's my recipe for popularity.

LADY MAB (*coming forward, to Blanche, frantically*). Do you know that's my last penny in the world ?

Loud cheering (which continues after the fall of the curtain. The band begins to play 'For he's a jolly good fellow.'

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ACT IV

SCENE : *Same as Act I.*

TIME : *Morning of the next day but one.*

Lady Mab is alone, looking through a pile of press-cuttings. The room has been disordered by the operation of packing.

Enter Aaron, back.

Lady Mab, without taking any notice of him, quietly drops the press-cuttings and resumes her packing.

AARON (*collecting himself*). Good morning, Mab. I dare say you know—the waiters are on strike, so I had to announce myself.

Lady Mab bows and then ignores him.

AARON (*more firmly*). Good morning, my dear.

Lady Mab ignores him.

AARON (*still more firmly*). Good morning, my adored goddess.

Lady Mab ignores him.

AARON. An affection of the throat? . . . Quinsy? No? (*He approaches her. She motions him away.*) Ah! Something contagious.

Lady Mab ignores him.

AARON. In a crisis like this the great danger is the danger of being stupid and conventional. The great safeguard is to remember that I am not a character in a novel, but a living man who has just had bacon and eggs for breakfast. A character in a novel would certainly say: 'I'm sorry I'm *de trop*,' and he would depart with sham dignity. I shan't say I'm sorry I'm *de trop*, and I shan't depart. . . . Mab, where is your famous politeness? . . . Mab, don't behave like a foolish capricious aristocrat. . . . Mab, don't be a damned fool.

Exit Lady Mab, L., carrying something into the next room.

AARON (*with restraint and with about twenty per cent. of humour in his tone*). Leave that door open or I'll break it in. (*Approaching the door*). You shall suffer for this, you ridiculous little sulking schoolgirl. What's the origin of this silly circus? Is it because I haven't written to

you ? I didn't know how to address the envelope. Is it because I put myself to the trouble of warning you about your preposterous uncle ? No. You were jolly grateful. (*A noise of something falling in the next room.*) Serves you right. You should have asked me to help you. . . . Is it because I didn't support you in the scrap with Blanche Nixon down at Bursley ? Rot ! You gave me a part to play, and I played it. And that's more than you can say for yourself, my girl. (*Lady Mab re-enters with boxes.*) And don't you imagine you can come the society darling over me, because you can't. I back myself to keep on talking longer than you can hold your tongue—your scandalous little forked tongue. And, if necessary, I'll assault you. And it'll be no use your ringing because there aren't any manly Corsican waiters to-day to come to your rescue. (*Lady Mab continues her packing.*) Only three days ago you wanted me to save your soul and to help you to fulfil yourself. You wanted to be my bally doormat. (*Lady Mab is now standing quite still.*) And now you seem determined to be Lot's wife. Well, you aren't Lot's wife. You're my fiancée. And anyhow I'm not Lot.

Lady Mab suddenly picks half a sheet of writing-paper off the table and hands it to him.

AARON. Ah! (*Reading.*) ‘Copy. The marriage arranged between Mr. Aaron Draper and Lady Mab Infold will not take place.’ Oh! Notice in writing to quit! Otherwise the simple chuck! Why? If I’m not too inquisitive.

LADY MAB (*removing the engagement ring from her finger. Very politely.*) I can’t return the presents because there haven’t been any——

AARON. Ah! At last. I knew I could keep on talking longer than you could hold your tongue.

LADY MAB. Except this of course. (*He takes the ring.*)

AARON. Well, as to there being no presents, you’ll admit that in the limited period at my disposal I couldn’t do very much in the gift line, could I?

LADY MAB. No, of course not. I’m not complaining.

AARON (*sardonically*). That’s very sweet of you. But I am. I asked you a question and you haven’t answered it. Why this dramatic rupture?

LADY MAB. I trusted you, and you failed me.

AARON. What ?

LADY MAB. I've made a fool of myself over this business of Blanche Nixon. I'm humiliated. I'm in a devil of a fix. And it's your fault.

AARON. How is it my fault ?

LADY MAB. You ought to have stopped me from doing it.

AARON. Didn't I try to stop you ? You wouldn't listen to me.

LADY MAB. That simply shows you're lacking in strength of character. I've been fatally disappointed in you.

AARON. Well, I'm dashed if that isn't more like a woman than anything I've ever heard.

LADY MAB. And if it is like a woman ? Did you want me to be unwomanly ? Besides, you're glad to be released from your engagement.

AARON. I'm one of the toys you've thrown away, but I admit I'm not a broken toy.

LADY MAB. My poor toy, somebody else has picked you up again already.

AARON. Oh! Who?

LADY MAB. The woman who was always kissing you.

AARON. So *that's* the real reason, is it?
(*Laughs harshly.*)

LADY MAB. It's one of the real reasons, of course.

AARON. But, hang it, can't you see you gave me a part to play, and I had to play it. In fact, I played my part a damned sight better than you played yours.

LADY MAB. You over-acted it, Mr. Draper. You and your lady friend seemed to me to spend practically the whole time in each other's arms.

AARON. There's just one thing——

LADY MAB. Yes, there is. And it's my packing. . . . I've sent that notice to the *Morning Post* and the *Times*. Good-bye. (*Exit, L.,*

seizing some things as she goes, and banging the door.)

Aaron whistles a tune.

Enter Blanche, back.

Aaron does not at first perceive her.

BLANCHE. Good morning, Mr. Draper.

AARON. Oh! Er—Miss Nixon. Good morning. . . . I—er—was just whistling.

BLANCHE (*as they shake hands*). Forgive my curiosity. But what *was* that tune you were whistling?

AARON. The tune the old cow died of.

BLANCHE. I thought it must be. I ought to apologize for interrupting, but thanks to the waiters' strike I had to announce myself. Is Lady Mab in?

AARON. Very much. In fact, she's all in.

They look at each other. Blanche sits down in front of the press-cuttings, and begins idly to turn them over.

BLANCHE. I see she's got her press-cuttings.

AARON (*vaguely*). Yes.

BLANCHE. I suppose you're both very angry with me for what I did.

AARON. Why? Have you been doing anything particular?

BLANCHE. Now please, Mr. Draper! The last two or three times you and I met we each of us had a part to play.

AARON. Well, we played our parts.

BLANCHE. We did. But the piece is now over, and we needn't play any longer.

AARON. I'm not playing.

BLANCHE. Then why do you ask with that innocent air whether I did anything particular?

AARON. For information.

BLANCHE. But it was all in yesterday's papers.

AARON. Yes. I suppose so. That was why I took care not to look at yesterday's papers. I'm quite sure you'll understand me, Miss Nixon, when I tell you that I was very uneasy about the whole business, and somehow I didn't *want* to look at yesterday's papers. So I didn't. I stopped at a hotel in Rugby by myself, and came back to town late last night when I knew everything would be over.

BLANCHE. And Lady Mab hasn't told you ?

AARON. Yes. She's told me a number of rather exciting things, but not a word about the stone-laying.

BLANCHE (*with a gesture of astonishment*). You're wounded.

AARON. Not mortally.

BLANCHE. Then if you really think you can stand it, you'd better look at that. (*She passes a full-page cutting from the 'Daily Mirror.'*) Quite a casual glance will do.

AARON (*glancing at the paper*). 'Lady Mab as social reformer. Society beauty's munificent gift—' It's not true !

BLANCHE. Too true.

AARON. Twenty-five thou— (Blanche *nods*. Aaron *bursts into loud laughter*.) But how did you manage to——

BLANCHE. The Victory Bond certificates happened to come in on the morning we left, and I happened to take them with me. And then—then—I happened to give them away to the Health Institute. . . . It came over me all of a sudden. The curious thing is, I don't regret it. (Aaron *laughs out loudly again*.) Mr. Draper (*benevolently*), don't be hysterical.

AARON. I should hope you *don't* regret it.

BLANCHE. But don't *you*? (*Maliciously*.) Lady Mab seems to regret it. In fact, she and I travelled to London in separate motor-cars yesterday.

AARON. Miss Nixon, believe me, I—do—not—regret it. In this highly dangerous comedy of ours you played your part magnificently, and the final stroke amounted to genius. Let me congratulate you. You have been tremendous. (*Very earnestly*.) You are tremendous. I've never seen a woman like you——

BLANCHE (*interrupting him*). Mr. Draper, Mr. Draper ! Please remember what I said a moment ago.

AARON. What was that ?

BLANCHE. The comedy is over. We needn't play any more. What would Lady Mab think if she saw her young man——

AARON (*interrupting*). Stop ! (*He gives her the copy of the notice to the newspapers.*)

BLANCHE (*reading it*). I'm very sorry.

AARON (*curtly*). Why should you be sorry ?
. . . Good-bye ! I'm off.

BLANCHE (*taking his outstretched hand*).
But——

AARON (*moved*). Well ?

BLANCHE. Then we shan't see one another again ?

AARON. That depends on you.

Enter Lady Mab in street attire.

LADY MAB (*seeing them hand in hand*). Naturally !

BLANCHE (*calmly and benevolently*). Oh ! Good morning. I was just telling Mr. Draper how sorry I am to hear that the end has come. And so soon too !

LADY MAB (*trying to adopt a tone similar to Blanche's*). Our engagement ! Well, I'm sure Mr. Draper will appreciate your sympathy more than anybody else's.

BLANCHE. I hope I'm not the innocent cause——

LADY MAB (*smiling*). My dear Miss Nixon, how *could* you be the innocent cause ? Have you come to see me or Mr. Draper ?

BLANCHE. You.

Aaron moves to leave.

LADY MAB. Where are you going, Mr. Draper ?

AARON. Hell.

LADY MAB. Postpone hell for a minute or two, will you ? You're in this affair, and I

think you ought to hear everything that's said. You don't mind, do you, Miss Nixon ?

BLANCHE. Not at all. I just looked in on my way from business to return these clothes of yours and to get the things I left here a few evenings ago. I can't possibly appear at the office in this. (*Indicating the frock she is wearing.*) Besides, it doesn't really fit me. Let me see now, there was the frock I came in, and some stockings and some undies. (*Aaron makes another move to go.*) Steady yourself, Mr. Draper, steady yourself. And a bag.

LADY MAB. But surely you came here in an evening frock. You can't go to business in that.

BLANCHE. I brought a morning dress in the bag.

LADY MAB. Did you ? Why ?

BLANCHE. Well, it has always been my motto that one thing may lead to another, Lady Mab.

LADY MAB. Ah ! So I'm Lady Mab for you at last !

BLANCHE. You were never anything else.

LADY MAB. May I ask when you first realized that I was myself ?

BLANCHE. Certainly. I was here, and Mr. Draper was standing here, and the typewriters were there, and you came in at that door, and you said : ' Good morning, I'm Lady Mab's secretary.' I then instantly realized that you were not Lady Mab's secretary, but Lady Mab herself.

LADY MAB. But how did you guess ?

BLANCHE. Oh ! What they call feminine intuition—and the funny way Mr. Draper sort of changed from a man into a sack of potatoes.

LADY MAB. Then all through there never was a moment when you were not acting ?

BLANCHE. Never.

LADY MAB. You acted most frightfully well.

BLANCHE. I play leads in the Turnham Green Amateur Dramatic Society.

LADY MAB. Ah ! That explains it.

BLANCHE. I've played Rosalind.

LADY MAB. Here you've played Hamlet.

BLANCHE. Well, Lady Mab, it was you who said you were somebody else. You ought to know. It wasn't my place to contradict you. I was only here to sell typewriting machines. But I saw you wanted a game, and I thought I might as well oblige you.

LADY MAB. Then you aren't really interested in spiritualism and multiple personality, and such things ?

BLANCHE. Oh yes I am—as an aid to business.

LADY MAB. What business ?

BLANCHE. The business of selling typewriters.

AARON. Miss Nixon, I hereby award you the cake.

LADY MAB (*calmly and sweetly*). Well, it may interest you to know that you've ruined me, between you. (*Blanche makes a movement.*) No ! Don't be disturbed. I know I've been in a very queer state up to this morning. But I'm all

right now. I'm quite curiously all right. And I'm ruined.

BLANCHE (*innocently*). Nineteenth century, transfer of vote. Twentieth century, transfer of profit.

AARON. How are you ruined? You've got rid of £25,000 in charity. But that isn't going to ruin me.

LADY MAB. It isn't *going* to ruin me. It has ruined me. I doubt if I've a hundred pounds in the world. I must leave these expensive rooms this very day. That's why I'm packing. You see I've always been terribly extravagant, and I hate the sight of pass-books. I've spent about half a fortune on Procopo—and he's not in the least grateful—geniuses never are—though I dare say he'd marry me if I asked him.

AARON. You may have spent half a fortune on launching Procopo, and squandered what was left in charity, but you're still related to about half the peerage, and your magnificent relatives will never let you starve.

LADY MAB (*proudly*). I shall certainly not carry my case to the House of Lords. I have

never allowed my relatives to meddle with my private misfortunes. Independence at all costs !

BLANCHE. Quite right.

LADY MAB. No. I'm ruined. My marriage is in the soup. My secretary is ill. I've never had a maid. There's a strike of waiters. I ring. No answer. I had to make my own tea this morning on a spirit-lamp, and it was very bad, and there was nothing to eat, and I've run out of cigarettes. And that's not all. I've got to disappear.

AARON. Disappear ? Why ?

LADY MAB. Because of Mr. and Mrs. Clews. I've treated them inexcusably. I stopped all photographs of the stone-laying. But (*indicating press-cuttings*) look at all these stock photographs of me in yesterday's papers. What a good thing we left Bursley before they arrived ! Mrs. Clews is bound to have seen some of them. In fact, she's bound to have seen all of them ; and as she's only just seen *us* she's bound to come to some very awkward conclusions. And if I know anything of my Mrs. Clews both she and the Mayor will be up in town to-day holding an inquiry.

AARON. Pity you didn't think of all this before.

LADY MAB. Yes.

AARON. However, you can explain things somehow.

LADY MAB. But how ?

AARON. *I* don't know. You told me a few days since that anything could be explained.

LADY MAB. I was forgetting the picture-papers ; and I hadn't met Mrs. Clews. No. I must disappear. It's all very well for you (*indicating* Blanche)—you're nobody. You can sink back safely into Turnham Green ; but I'm Lady Mab Infold, notorious from China to Peru. And that isn't all either. The worst thing of all is that I've been humiliated. I mean I've humiliated myself. I've lost my self-confidence. I started out on this affair, and I didn't carry it through. I know it's entirely my own fault. I'm only telling you as a penance. (*Ingenuously.*) And I'm quite nice about it, aren't I ?

BLANCHE. You're altogether too nice. And it isn't entirely your fault. The Clewses have

been treated abominably, and for that I'm just as much to blame as you are. Of course you must disappear.

LADY MAB. I must become a mystery.

BLANCHE. You—(*hesitates*)

LADY MAB. Yes ?

BLANCHE. May I make a little speech ? . . . Well, I will. But first of all here's a cigarette. Mr. Draper, light it.

LADY MAB (*eagerly*). Oh, thanks. (*Smokes.*)

BLANCHE. Lady Mab, you are not ruined. On the contrary, you are made. You reached the zenith of your career yesterday. Never before have you created such a stir in the public life of this country. Never before were you so gorgeously on the map. Your speech at the stone-laying, and your glorious gift of £25,000 to the Bursley Health Institute, have thrilled the homes of England to their very vitals. You will say that it was I who did these things. But I was only the instrument. You chose me, and perhaps you chose brilliantly. Who am I to say ? You are free of Mr. Aaron Draper, for

whom you never had more than a passing fancy. You have discovered your own shortcomings. You know yourself. You are humble. It is a splendid moment for you to vanish and to become somebody else in a sense far deeper than Procopo ever thought of. You spoke just now of 'independence at all costs.' But you have never been independent. You can't even make your own tea decently. Come out with me and achieve independence. You once told me you hated being an amateur. Come out with me and cease to be an amateur. I will find a post for you in our office, and you shall learn an art of which you are still most beautifully ignorant—the art of being really alive and really independent. Come out with me, and be Jane Smith. . . . Does it appeal to you ?

LADY MAB (*after a pause*). And damn all my relatives.

BLANCHE. Most decidedly.

LADY MAB (*rushing to Blanche and embracing her*). I'll come. (*Kissing her again.*) What an adventure ? When do we begin ?

BLANCHE. As you've eaten nothing, we begin by going to the Lyons in St. James's Street and having a jolly good breakfast.

LADY MAB. How ripping ! D'you know I've never been in a Lyons ? Will you come in here and change your clothes ?

Blanche and Lady Mab go towards the door, L.

AARON. And what price me, please ?

BLANCHE. You might wait and carry my bag down to the hall for us.

Exeunt Blanche and Lady Mab, L.

Aaron whistles to himself.

Enter the Marquis of Wix.

MARQUIS. Ah ! Good morning, my dear boy.

AARON (*glumly*). Good morning, Lord Wix.
(*They shake hands.*)

MARQUIS. There seems to be a strike of waiters in this place. So I had to announce myself. I'm damned old, but I never remember having to do such a thing before.

AARON. No ?

MARQUIS. Mab in ?

AARON (*cautiously*). She's in somewhere. But she's not alone. I was just going.

MARQUIS (*looking at him ; confidentially*). You're feeling a bit cheap to-day, Draper. So am I. It's probably due to this newly imported champagne that one meets with everywhere just now. Good wine, no doubt ; excellent for French consumption ; but not properly prepared for the English market. France has never really understood champagne. However, there's one bright spot : the doctors are prescribing port for gout.

AARON. Indeed !

MARQUIS (*sits*). Now, my dear boy, you are the very person I wanted to see.

AARON. But——

MARQUIS (*amiably waving aside interruption*). I count on your sagacity. I received this telegram from Mab three evenings ago. I called to see her last night about it, but she had not returned. I'd much sooner see you. 'My sweetest uncle. I absolutely forbid you to come here to-morrow. If you do I will make a scandal. Mab.'

AARON. Well ?

MARQUIS. I pass over minor questions. For me the only important question is this. I'm going to speak to you as a member of the family with the utmost frankness. (*With emphasis.*) *How did our darling capricious Mab know that I had laid myself open to blackmail ?* I foolishly imagined that nothing whatever had got abroad.

AARON (*with a sudden change of tone*). Marquis, will you take my advice ?

MARQUIS. I will.

AARON (*urgently*). Then go away at once. This is not the moment. Call again later—some other time, any time ; but don't stay now.

MARQUIS. But really I should like——

AARON. Go instantly. Don't stay a second.

MARQUIS (*rising, perturbed*). There is danger ?

AARON (*shepherding him towards the door*). Emphatically. Good-bye. (*He opens the door.*)

Enter Lady Mab, L.

MARQUIS (*outside the door*). Would it be safe this afternoon ?

AARON. I think so. I'll 'phone. Good-bye.

MARQUIS. Thanks, my dear boy. Thanks.
(*Exit.*)

Aaron shuts the door.

LADY MAB. Who was that ?

AARON. Your uncle. I shifted him off quick, so that you can leave unmolested ; and you ought to be jolly grateful to me.

LADY MAB. What did he want ?

AARON. That telegram he got from Bursley threatening a scandal. He's taken it seriously. Been up to something naughty and thinks you've found out about it. Fancies you may prove to be a kind of a blackmailer. Wanted to explain. I wouldn't let him.

LADY MAB (*after a peal of laughter*). Fetch him back. Fetch him back.

AARON. I won't.

LADY MAB (*rushing to the door, opening it, and crying out*). Uncle! Uncle! Yes, it's Mab. (*Turning to Aaron.*) You are a pig. (*To the approaching Marquis.*) I'm free now, uncle. How are you? Come in, do. (*Enter the Marquis. She shakes hands with him.*) But I haven't much time. Sit down and tell me *your* version of this little affair. And be sure you tell me all.

MARQUIS (*seated, rather overset*). Well, perhaps I ought to begin by explaining——

LADY MAB (*with charming imperiousness*). No preliminaries. This isn't the House of Lords.

MARQUIS. My dear niece. There is a great American lecture agent in London named Pawkins. He has with him an American lady secretary. Not a child, but attractive. Excessively attractive. Too attractive. Came across him—and her—under circumstances——

LADY MAB. Never mind the circumstances.

MARQUIS. In spite of the fact that I am a widower of considerable experience, I was attracted—greatly. I—er—but you don't want details . . . though they are entirely honourable. . . . The usual complications. . . . After a time

I made an arrangement. Whatever you may have heard, Mab, that is the whole truth. I wanted you to know the facts from myself. Of course I'm sure you wouldn't *really* make a scandal, but your control of your delicious tongue is sometimes imperfect, and it is specially important in these coal-mining days that no breath of scandal should attach to an owner of coal-royalties. The position of royalty-owners is already quite prejudiced enough.

LADY MAB. Well, uncle, I must say your confession surprises me ; but I'm relieved it's no worse. What 'arrangement' did you make ?

MARQUIS. Quite simple. I undertook to use my influence to get a few AI lecturers for the lecture-agency. Mr. Pawkins—and secretary—are going back with a remarkable list of stars entirely new to the American lecture-platform.

LADY MAB (*thoughtful*). Oh ! Whom have you got ?

MARQUIS. Well, various very important persons.

LADY MAB. But whom, for instance ?

MARQUIS. Well, yesterday I got your Procopo.

LADY MAB. You got Procopo? Procopo is leaving?

MARQUIS. Day after to-morrow, with Pawkins; on the *Aquitania*. He seemed rather anxious to go at once. Some trouble brewing in the Press, I gathered.

LADY MAB (*in a new tone*). Does Pawkins pay high fees?

MARQUIS. Very. And you see that my work is patriotic, because the fees paid to British subjects help to correct the adverse American exchange.

LADY MAB. How much does Pawkins pay for a first-class lecturer?

MARQUIS. Oh! A thousand dollars a lecture—and expenses.

LADY MAB (*gay and uplifted*). Would he like to have me?

MARQUIS. He would undoubtedly give his

head to get you, but surely you wouldn't dream——

LADY MAB. Wouldn't I? He shall have me. I'll go on the *Aquitania*. Come along with me at once and let's arrange it, uncle.

MARQUIS. But——

LADY MAB. But what?

MARQUIS. You can't possibly get a berth on the *Aquitania*.

LADY MAB. Pooh! I can always get what I want. You must fix it up for me. Come on! Come on! Not a moment to lose!

MARQUIS. But—er—Aaron.

AARON. Don't worry about me.

LADY MAB. Please do not interfere between me and Mr. Draper. (*Taking the Marquis by the arm.*) Now! Here is the door. See!

MARQUIS. Mab! Mab! What next, I wonder.

Enter Blanche with bag.

LADY MAB (*pushing Marquis out*). Au revoir, Miss Nixon. I've decided to go on a lecturing tour in the United States. Must run off now with uncle and make the arrangements.

Exeunt Lady Mab and the Marquis.

Blanche and Aaron stare at each other. Blanche drops the bag.

AARON. So you see !

BLANCHE (*calmly*). Yes. (*Reflective.*) Strange it never occurred to me before !

AARON. What ?

BLANCHE (*genially*). Why, of course she was *born* to give lectures in America. That's how they'll all end.

AARON. All who ?

BLANCHE. All the Lady Mabs. They'll think that's what Columbus discovered America for.

AARON. You're a terrible woman.

BLANCHE (*sweetly*). I am. And I'm hungry.
Shall we go to Lyons ?

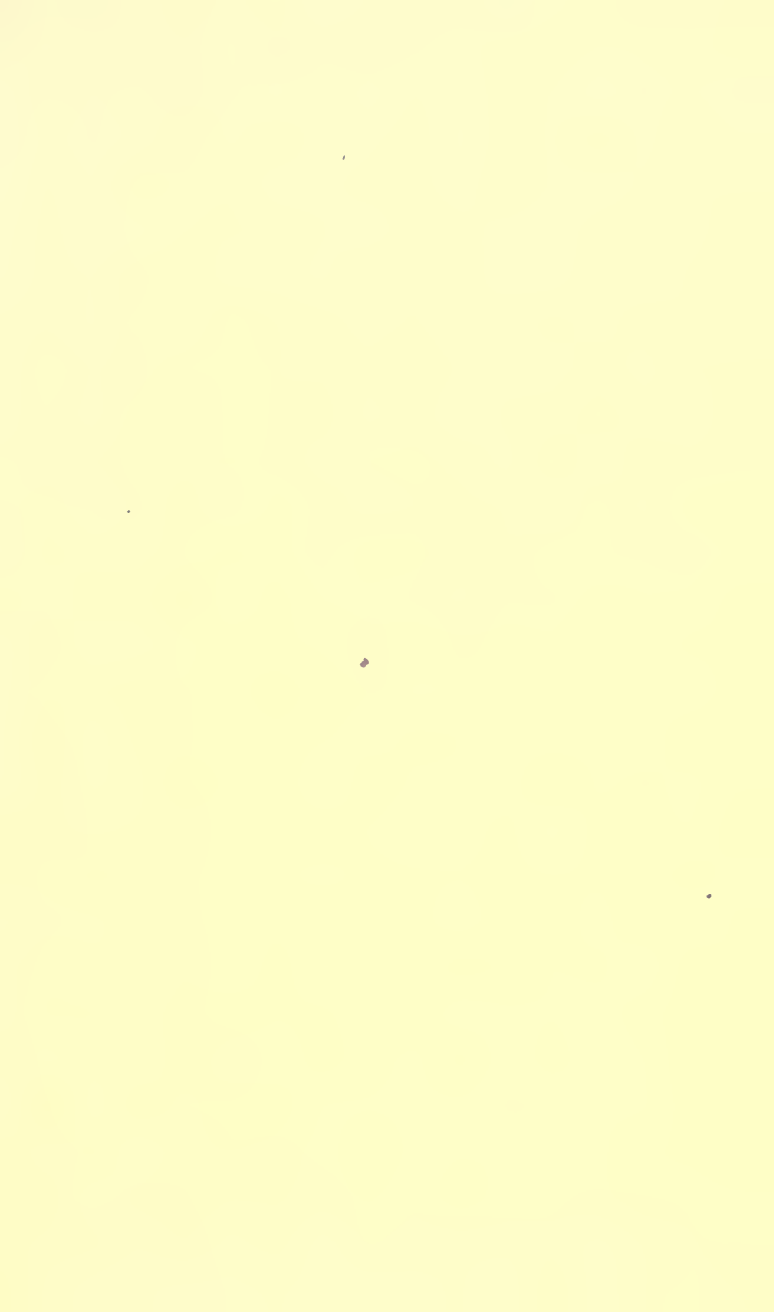
AARON. Yes, let's.

BLANCHE (*with Midland accent*). But look
here, young man. This 'ere bag. Art going to
lug it down St. James's Street ?

AARON (*with Midland accent*). I am that !

CURTAIN

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